

"Grand Misconceptions"  
Draft 2

by  
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Ext. GARDENS OF MANSION - AFTERNOON

TITLE: CAMPERDOWN LODGE. SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA 1869

Two young boys JASPER 12 and CUTHBERT (10) sneak around a deserted house. The windows are shuttered, the gardens unkempt.

Another boy BERTIE (12 YEARS) stands cowering under an overgrown hedge. The other boys run to a fountain and duck below it looking back at the frightened boy.

JASPER

Come on Bertie.

The boy doesn't move, he's rooted to the spot.

CUTHBERT

What is it Bertie? Seen a ghost?

Bertie thinks he can see a ghost. Through the holes in the curtain of a window an ominous silhouette looms. He can't move, he can't speak, he just points.

Jasper and Cuthbert can't see the figure from where they are. They shrug their shoulders and venture on.

They scurry round the house catching their clothes on the over grown ivy.

They hear a creaking sound.

Bertie tries to look through the cracks in the boarded up window. He sees something but can't make it out. He pulls at the rotting wood, a piece falls off easily.

He wipes layers of grime off the window and peers in.

Through the layers of dust is a room filled with cobwebs, faded paintings grace the walls. The crack of sunlight catches on the faded gilt of the chairs and sends insects scurrying.

BERTIE

Come have a gander at this.

Cuthbert can't hear him, he's discovered the sound of the creaking. The front door, it's ajar.

Bertie can't take his eyes off the room, once so grand is now in complete decay. He sees the table is set for a feast, in the centre of the table is a cake, in tiers, untouched and apart from a caking of dust, as perfect and delicate as the day it was made.

Cuthbert sees the front door ajar and tentatively opens it. Jasper looks on from a safe distance.

Bertie is agog at the splendour of the room and peers in wonder.

The front door catches on the chain. The snout of a vicious dog sticks out of the door and growls.

Bertie teeters on the window ledge trying to look further around the room.

A woman's face appears at the window.

The hound barks.

The boys run screaming down the gravel driveway.

They reach the rusted gates and stop to catch their breath.

A black carriage appears, they get out of the road.

The carriage saunters down the gravel driveway.

The boys look on, exhausted, terrified and curious.

The carriage arrives at the door of the mansion and a well dressed man PLORN (LATE TWENTIES AND ELEGANTLY ATTIRE) alights.

He goes to knock at the door, but notices it ajar, he moves it gently till it catches on the chain and the snout of the bullmastiff appears ready to growl.

The young man bends down.

PLORN

Hello fella, what's your name?

He lets the animal get his scent, the old dog licks his fingers and lets out a friendly woof.

The chain rattles and the young man straightens himself.

The door opens slowly, the man is nervous.

Even more so when he sees who is behind the door, a beautiful young woman ANNA (18 YEARS OLD) with masses of ringlets, a simple white dress and a smile so bright he is bedazzled.

ANNA

You must be Mr. Dickens.

The young man almost corrects her, but realises she is right.

PLORN

Yes, yes, you must be Estel...

ANNA

Anna.

The man is apologetic.

PLORN

I am most terribly sorry, a slip of the tongue.

Anna isn't listening she turns and starts walking down the corridor.

ANNA

Miss Donnithorne is expecting you.

Plorn makes his way into the hallway, the dog has taken a shine to him and jumps up as Plorn fights to get past.

ANNA (CONT'D)

All though I have no idea what you are expecting?

Anna stops at a coat rack, Plorn hands her his hat.

Plorn finally frees himself of the amorous dog. The dog whines loudly and pulls on the end of his chain He spots an open door and sees the wedding feast. He stops in his tracks and says to himself.

PLORN

So it is true.

Anna whispers over his shoulder.

ANNA

Yes, it happened. (Beat) Or not as the case may be.

She opens the door a little wider, Plorn is speechless. On the far side of the room a maid (SARAH - EARLY THIRTIES)fusses with the curtains, she spots the guests and scurries past them. Anne waltzes into the room. She stops at the wedding cake.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Twenty bakers worked five days  
round the clock to make this  
cake.

She blows off some of the dust to reveal a simple pink  
sugar rose. Anna marvels at the rose and gently brushes  
more dust off the cake.

ANNA (CONT'D)

She says it has so much brandy in  
it it'll still be here when men  
fly to the moon. We don't come in  
here much these days.

PLORN

Why do you keep it this way?

ANNA

I would have cleared it all up  
years ago, would have saved us a  
lot of trouble.

Anna runs her finger along the dust and stares at it  
intently.

ANNA (CONT'D)

But Mama believes this room is  
enchanted, she says time itself  
stopped at twenty to nine that  
morning.

Plorn is fascinated by her fascination with the dust.

She blows the dust off her finger and jumps back to  
reality.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Only come in here these days  
after a visit by the local  
hooligans looking for a fright.

Anna picks up a dusty lace napkin and puts it over her  
head.

ANNA (CONT'D)

That's when they meet the ghost  
of Camperdown Lodge whooo oooo.

Ann realises Plorn does not share her zany sense of humour -  
or is too restrained to react and pulls the napkin from her  
face.

ANNA (CONT'D)

She'll have heard Magwitch, so  
she knows your here, we'd better  
go.

Plorn isn't listening, he struck by the clock on the mantle  
piece stopped at twenty minutes to nine.

She stands at the door eager to usher him along. Plorn  
recognises her impatience and bumbles out of the room.

They walk down the corridor.

PLORN

You call the dog Magwitch?

ANNA

Officially his name is Maverick.

She arrives at a door which is slightly ajar and whispers.

ANNA (CONT'D)

I just call him that for my own  
amusement.

Her lip curls as she smiles, Plorn tilts his head and  
gently knocks on the door.

MISS DONNITHORNE

It's open - are you blind?

Anna rolls her eyes and opens the door. Plorn walks in to a  
wondrous library with bookshelves to the ceiling. At the  
end of the room is a roaring fire and a winged arm chair,  
another bull mastiff sits at her side. Plorn approaches the  
chair.

A hand stops him.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)

Give it to me.

Plorn is taken off guard by the ferocity of the request,  
but takes the brown paper parcel he is carrying and unwraps  
the string.

PLORN

My Father expressly wished that I  
visit you Miss Donnithorne, he  
asked that I deliver this to you  
in person. He had always intended  
on giving to you himself, but his  
health has deteriorated over the  
years.

The hand shakes with impatience.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Yes, yes, just give it to me.

Plorn hands over the leather bound volume.

The elegant hand snatches the book and throws it in the fire.

The Flames lick at the cover, written in gilt is the title; "Great Expectations" by Charles Dickens.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDY OF LARGE MANSION - AFTERNOON.

TITLE: CHARLES DICKEN'S STUDY JUNE 1861

CHARLES DICKENS (LATE 50'S) sits in front of the fire, his head in his hands.

Through one of the many french doors that lead to an idyllic and sunny garden, a young woman NELLY (EARLY TWENTIES) in flowing yellow dress with matching parasol glides into the room.

NELLY  
My goodness Charles, it's June  
and you have the fire roaring.  
Are you feeling well?

Charles is distracted.

CHARLES  
Yes, yes I'm fine.

He looks up from his desk, his eyes are red and he shakes slightly.

The young blonde woman is truly beautiful, a contrast to the old grey man behind the desk.

She turns her head and looks at him through one eye.

NELLY  
Have you been writing today?

CHARLES  
Of course I've been writing.

NELLY  
Honestly Charles, sometimes I wonder.

She sits on the side of his desk, the late afternoon light catches her, she looks like a goddess and leans over giving him a peep at her magnificent cleavage.

NELLY (CONT'D)  
There are times I think you sit  
here facing your demons and  
writing nothing.

She touches his cheek gently.

NELLY (CONT'D)  
And you know I know how to deal  
with them.

Charles turns away.

CHARLES  
I have plenty to occupy my  
mind...

He dips his quill in ink and looks at her with a wry smile.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
And quill.

He raises an eyebrow.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
But maybe later.

Nelly pouts. She looks downward, then spots an envelope and picks it up and turns the envelope over to see the return address.

ANNA  
Ooh you got a letter from New  
South Wales, one of your old  
convict buddies no doubt?

Charles is flummoxed for a second.

CHARLES  
No, the daughter of a friend of a  
friend. Just local gossip and  
tittle tattle really, nothing of  
great import.

Nelly jumps off the table, she's lost interest.

NELLY  
So I don't have to worry about  
Miss Eliza Donnithorne then?

Charles shakes his head and blows her a kiss. She sees this as a sign to leave. She gets to the door and turns to say something, but Charles takes a fresh sheet of paper, dips his quill in the ink pot and looks up at her - pen poised.

As soon as the door is shut, Charles opens a drawer of his desk and pulls out a large bottle of medicine and a very large silver spoon. He pours the tincture, his hand shakes so badly he spills the sticky liquid on the leather bound desk. He moves his mouth to the spoon to avoid spilling more and slurps.

He screws the lid back on the bottle, licks the spoon hard on both sides and tucks them back in his desk drawer. He spots the sticky liquid on the desk, looks around quickly to check no one's watching and licks it up greedily then wipes the desk with his sleeve.

He notices the many pages of Miss Donnithorne's letter, turns and reads them in front of the fire.

CUT TO:

INT. MISS DONNITHORNE'S CHAMBERS. SEPTEMBER 1861 - MORNING.

TITLE: CAMPERDOWN LODGE SEPTEMBER 1861

MISS DONNITHORNE (MID THIRTIES) is radiant in the early morning light. She lays in her luxurious bedroom, a fire roars in the corner, a tray of half eaten breakfast at the end of the bed.

Miss Donnithorne turns over and pulls the covers over her head. The dog stops barking, she smiles and snuggles tight.

The dog barks again.

And again.

Miss Donnithorne can't stand it any longer, she throws the covers back and stomps out of bed. Throws on a robe and storms down the corridor.

Maverick is straining on the end of his leash, Miss Donnithorne barks a command from the end of the corridor then turns and heads to the kitchen at the back of the grand house.

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE KITCHEN - MORNING.

Sarah the maid and a teenage ANNA are sitting around the large marble topped kitchen table in the centre of the large pot-laden kitchen sharing a cup of tea.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
What's going on here?

Anna looks blank.

ANNA  
We're having a cup of tea.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Can't you hear Maverick?

The older woman pipes up.

SARAH  
Not from here Ma'am. But Beth's in the front room, it's been a bit crazy in that part of the house all week.

Miss Donnithorne flies off. The girls snigger.

ANNA  
It's been a bit crazy in that part of the house for years!

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING.

Miss Donnithorne opens the grand doors to the dining room, the light from the door cuts a swathe through the room.

The light hits the brilliant white wedding cake, the cutlery glistens, the crockery is colourful and the fruit is fresh.

By the windows a maid BETH (LATE TEENS) stands on a chair fussing with the curtains, she stands to attention.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
What on earth is going on this morning?

The maid peeks out of the curtain.

BETH

The latest edition of that horrible series must have come out. Seems more people read the papers than we thought. Carriages have been pulling up at all hours. They've ripped the shutters off completely. It's been a job to keep these curtains pulled tight and poor Maverick's been beside himself for hours.

Miss Donnithorne joins Beth at the window and opens them wide enough to peep through.

Outside a group of people wait at the closed gates. A photographer has a massive camera on a tripod and three assistants fussing around to take a shot of the house.

BETH (CONT'D)

Do you think it would be safer if we shut the door. Even at night?

Miss Donnithorne doesn't move.

At the gate a YOUNG WOMAN with three scruffy young kids and a babe in arms walks through the throng, she opens the gates and hurries the kids down the gravel driveway.

Miss Donnithorne pulls back from the window and walks calmly out of the room. Maverick lets out a friendly woof.

MISS DONNITHORNE

That won't be necessary.

She walks into the hallway, pats the happy dog on the head, takes a pair of white silk gloves from the hall table and a gold coin from a tin in the top drawer.

She walks to the open door and gracefully holds out her hand with the coin between her fingers.

On the other side of the door the woman with the children grabs the coin.

WOMAN WITH CHILDREN

Thank you ma'am.

MISS DONNITHORNE

Now remember give part of that to someone who needs it more than you.

WOMAN WITH CHILDREN

There ain't many who need it more  
than us ma'am.

MISS DONNITHORNE

But you know someone.

WOMAN WITH CHILDREN

Yes ma'am.

Miss Donnithorne pulls her hand away, gently rolls down the silk gloves and places them back in the drawer.

The woman smiles and gathers up her kids who are playing in the immaculate gardens.

EXT. GATES OF CAMPERDOWN LODGE \_ MORNING.

Back at the gate the crowd marvel at the photograph on a metal plate that has been developed in a make shift black tent, they barely notice the woman coming back through the gates.

Her eldest son spots the photograph.

An onlooker MAN IN HAT (FORTIES) spots her.

MAN IN HAT

Do you know Miss Donnithorne?

The woman doesn't want to answer and tries to round up her kids.

MAN IN HAT (CONT'D)

Have you ever seen her?

The crowd hear the questions and join in.

WOMAN WITH PARASOL.

Have you been in the house?

PORTLY MAN IN SUIT

Is there really a wedding feast?

WOMAN IN BLACK

Does she still wear her wedding dress?

The woman has her kids in tow, two of them under her arms.

WOMAN WITH KIDS

All I ever see is a white gloved hand with a gold coin.

She strides off the crowd follow.

MAN IN HAT

Does she ever say anything to you?

WOMAN WITH KIDS

All she says is to give some of the money to someone who needs it more.

WOMAN IN BLACK

And do you?

WOMAN WITH KIDS

Course I do. She may never go out, but she knows everything you know.

The crowd stop and look back at the house.

WOMAN IN BLACK

Witch craft I told yer - she's usin' magic and not the good stuff neither.

The woman marches her kids down the street.

WOMAN WITH KIDS.

First we're going to the bakery and then we'll visit old Mrs. Flattery.

KIDS

Awww do we have to?

WOMAN WITH KIDS.

Don't you want a sugar bun?

The kids start running down the street, the woman smiles and runs after them, baby in swaddling and all.

The portly man turns to the man in the hat.

PORTLY MAN IN SUIT

Maybe we should go and get us one of those gold coins.

One of the photographer's assistants laughs and holds a blood stained, bandaged hand in the air.

## PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT

Didn't you hear the woman? Miss  
Donnithorne knows everything, and  
that hound of hers doesn't miss a  
trick neither!

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, MISS DONNITHORNE'S CHAMBERS.  
MORNING.

Miss Donnithorne walks into her chamber and throws her dressing gown on the bed. She opens her grand wardrobe a single lilac dress stands apart from the dozens of white dresses each of a different style hanging there. She selects a dress covered in fragile lace and throws it on the bed. Then walks to the tallboy, pulls out white lace stockings and undergarments.

She watches herself in the three way mirror of her dressing table as she discards her nightdress and slowly rolls the stockings over her long supple legs. She pulls a waspish waist with her girdle and sweeps the fragile dress over her head, wiggling her hips as it falls in place.

She leans toward the mirror, plumps her hair and pinches her cheeks, takes a simple strand of pearls, places them around her neck and smiles.

She walks down the corridor and into the front room. Beth is still anxiously looking out the window.

MISS DONNITHORNE

Pull the door to in here. We'll  
keep it closed till the fuss dies  
down.

Beth spies a handsome clergy man REVERENT STEPHENS (EARLY THIRTIES) ignoring the throng at the gate.

BETH

Reverent Stephens is coming  
ma'am.

Miss Donnithorne turns.

MISS DONNITHORNE

Well you'd better do me up then.

Beth huffs.

BETH

I don't know why you don't call me to tighten your bodice.

MISS DONNITHORNE

Oh just tuck it in so it doesn't show.

Beth struggles with the mess of laces and eyelets.

Miss Donnithorne can't stand the fussing.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)

Enough, enough.

She storms out of the room laces flying behind her and opens the front door before the clergyman has even knocked. She turns her back to the wall to greet him.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)

Vicar, so lovely to see you.

She reaches for his coat and hangs it on the peg by dancing around him so he can't see her bodice, then gestures for him to lead the way.

They enter the library and sit on the two wing chairs by the ever burning fire.

Miss Donnithorne rubs her hands over the flames to warm them. The vicar reaches into his bag and pulls out some letters and a couple of books, he hands them to Miss Donnithorne, making sure she pays attention to the large packet on top.

VICAR

Mr. Dickens has responded to your letter, how very exciting, and judging by the size of the parcel, he's sent you a manuscript. My goodness, what a blessing, half of Sydney would kill for the contents of that package, the whole town is abuzz with the ventures of Pip.

Miss Donnithorne turns the parcel over and checks the seal.

VICAR (CONT'D)

You are going to open it aren't you?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Eventually. Who knows what's in  
there.

She gives the vicar a disapproving nod and puts all the letters on the side table. She opens the packet of books with excitement, places all the large volumes on top of the letters and holds a small pamphlet like a prized object.

She starts flicking through the pages, on the cover in plain type is "The Philosopher's Stone" by Hans Christian Anderson.

VICAR  
I don't know why you still  
distract yourself with those  
fairy tales.

Miss Donnithorne starts reading.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Isn't everything a fairy tale?

The vicar puffs himself up, then smiles out of the corner of his mouth.

VICAR  
I certainly hope you're not  
insinuating anything about the  
good book again.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
What Wuthering Heights?

VICAR  
You know perfectly well which  
book I mean.

Miss Donnithorne looks over the top of the pamphlet, enjoying the friendly banter.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Of course I do, it's the only one  
you've ever read.

VICAR  
The only one WORTH reading.

Miss Donnithorne goes back to the pages.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Yes, yes fairy tales the lot.

She starts reading aloud.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)

FAR away towards the east, in India, which seemed in those days to be the world's end, stood the Tree of the Sun; a noble tree, such as we have never seen, and perhaps never may see.

VICAR

Oh we're not going to start this one again are we?

MISS DONNITHORNE

The same symbols, the same stories, the same characters. Babies born to virgin mothers, floating in baskets. Who am I talking about Moses? Krishna?

VICAR

And what of beautiful princesses locked in a tower?

MISS DONNITHORNE

They become Queen and realise a paltry kiss can only give them a breath of life.

VICAR

And that is all you believe you deserve? A breath of life?

Miss Donnithorne sighs loudly.

MISS DONNITHORNE

Oh dear sweet Thomas, how long have we known each other?

VICAR

Going on fifteen years.

MISS DONNITHORNE

And when have you seen me not full of life?

The vicar thinks.

VICAR

Agreed you are full of life, but is it a full life?

Miss Donnithorne goes back to her book.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Of course it is.

VICAR  
But you haven't stepped foot out  
of this house for years, there's  
a whole new world out there.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
You think I haven't seen them at  
the gate? A whole new generation  
of sensation seekers, all rapt by  
the scandal and the madness? I  
find a greater world here in my  
library surrounded by great  
literature. I am above Mr.  
Dickens' ha'penny tales. Thank  
you for bringing me my supplies  
and the sermon. See you at church  
next week.

VICAR  
But you don't come to church.

Miss Donnithorne still doesn't look up.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
No, like all good things, it  
comes to me.

The vicar shakes his head, stands and bows, turns and  
leaves the room. Miss Donnithorne smiles to herself.

As soon as the door is shut she reaches for the manuscript  
and opens it in haste.

CHARLES DICKENS (VO)  
My Dear Miss Donnithorne, I must  
apologise for any inconvenience  
the serialisation of my novel  
Great Expectations has caused you  
and your household. There are a  
few similarities between yourself  
and the fictional Miss Haversham,  
and it is possible I may have  
heard your story somewhere, but  
for the life of me I have no idea  
where. I had thought you were a  
product of my imagination. If  
perchance knowledge of your  
circumstances swept into my  
subconscious by the means of  
hearsay then I most  
wholeheartedly apologise.

Miss Donnithorne puts the letter on her lap, sighs, and picks up the manuscript.

CHARLES (VO)

I appreciate your need to 'set the matter straight' and have been enthralled by the story of your life. However the tale I have created is complete. By the time this correspondence reaches you the final chapters will be on their way to the typesetters. Miss Haversham's fate is sealed.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLES DICKEN'S STUDY. AFTERNOON

TITLE: GAD HILL JUNE 1861

In an elegant script Charles writes the final words "Miss Haversham's fate is sealed".

He stops, looks once again at the sheets of fine paper filled with lines of exacting script. He places them face down on the desk.

CHARLES

You die in a fire Miss Haversham,  
you die in a fire.

Charles picks up his quill, signs his name and places the letter atop a manuscript. He takes a large envelope from his bottom drawer and stuffs it with the letter to Miss Donnithorne. He writes her name and address on the front cover, puts his pen back in the ink pot and smiles, pleased with himself.

He reaches to his cigar box and retrieves a large corona, and takes a tinder stick and places in the flames, he sits back and lights his cigar.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, LIBRARY. SEPTEMBER 1861 - EVENING.

Miss Donnithorne still sits by the fire reading the final pages, she lets out a huff as she puts the final page down.

The door to the library opens and Anna skips in, Miss Donnithorne stuffs the manuscript down the side of her wing chair.

ANNA  
Have you finished yet?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Finished what?

ANNA  
Great Expectations of course.

Miss Donnithorne peers round from the wing of the chair.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
And how do you know about this?

ANNA  
Reverend Stephens of course.

Miss Donnithorne sighs.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
It's a good job that man isn't a  
catholic.

ANNA  
Why?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Couldn't keep a confidence if his  
life depended on it.

Anna sits at Miss Donnithorne's feet in front of the fire  
and looks up at her.

ANNA  
So Mr Dickens did send you the  
manuscript.

Miss Donnithorne pulls the papers from between the  
cushions.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Yes, I'm afraid he did.

ANNA  
And?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Miss Haversham dies in a fire an  
old bitter woman, that should  
stop the gossip.

ANNA  
Why?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Because I'm obviously not burned  
to death.

ANNA  
But they will still think you're  
old and bitter.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
And I care?

Anna turns and stares at the fire.

ANNA  
So what happens to Estella?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
You don't want to know.

ANNA  
Does she end up marrying Pip?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Ah sweet Anna, such a romantic.  
Alas Mr Dickens tale is as cold  
as his heart, a dark story where  
no one fares well.

Miss Donnithorne puts down the script.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
Enough of Mr Dickens' twaddle - I  
have something far superior.

She picks the Hans Christian Anderson book up and waves it  
in the air.

Anna runs up and notices the long silk book mark hanging  
from its pages.

ANNA  
You haven't started without me?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Only the first couple of  
paragraphs, come, you read.

Anna pulls up the other chair and sits on it cross legged.

CUT TO:

INT.CHARLES DICKENS' STUDY - EVENING.

Nellie opens the door to the study with caution, then smiles as she sees Charles asleep by the fire. She bustles up to his desk and takes the now empty laudanum bottle and screws the lid back on, she notices the parcel for Miss Donnithorne and picks it up.

Underneath the package she spots the pages of written script picks them up carefully and studies them.

NELLY (VO)

Dear Mr Dickens. The whole of Sydney is abuzz with your new serialisation Great Expectations. From all accounts it is a rip roaring tale. However the people of this town are under the misguided impression that your Miss Haversham character is indeed myself.

Nelly giggles to herself and settles down into the sofa to have a read.

NELLY (VO) (CONT'D)

I had hoped the scandal of my uneventful nuptials would have died down over the years, however the publication of your novel in parts has brought hoards of inquisitive strangers to my gate.

Charles stirs, Nelly looks up furtively, then back to the pages - she is fascinated.

NELLY (VO) (CONT'D)

I have no idea where you heard my story, nor the fate you have in store for your character. But if your Miss Haversham is a facsimile of myself, then please do me the honour of listening to my story.

CUT TO:

INT. ST JAMES' PALACE, COURT. 1786 - AFTERNOON.

TITLE: ST JAMES' PALACE 1786

A young boy (JAMES DONNITHORNE 13) in new and uncomfortable britches walks slowly toward the throne with his proud, but concerned Father (JAMES DONNITHORNE SNR. EARLY 40'S).

NELLY (VO)

I am a woman of noble birth. The daughter of the late James Donnithorne...

They walk towards the throne, the king (KING GEORGE - LATE FIFTIES) sits talking gibberish, he notices the man and boy.

MAD KING GEORGE

So who do we have here?

JAMES'S FATHER

Donnithorne your highness and my son James as you requested.

The King peers over at the pretty boy.

MAD KING GEORGE

Sensible lad is he?

JAMES'S FATHER

And bright your highness.

MAD KING GEORGE

Good, just what the Prince of Wales needs - a tempering influence. Take him to Georges chambers.

The King turns back to the enthusiastic court.

MAD KING GEORGE (CONT'D)

I dreamt last night of a one armed dwarf ruling France. I see it. I do. Can't you?

The chamber giggles politely.

The man and boy walk backwards out of the throne room and rush towards the Princes chambers, they reach the door.

MR DONNITHORNE

Shall I introduce you?

JAMES

No, I can take it from here.

He knocks on the door, his father walks away fidgeting.

CUT TO:

INT. GEORGES CHAMBERS -EVENING

The door is slightly opened by a young maid, she hides her body behind the door.

JAMES

I'm James Donnithorne, I believe  
the prince is expecting me.

GIRL BEHIND DOOR

Oh.

She opens the door to see a very fat young man (PRINCE JAMES - 24) prostate on the bed surrounded by young girls in various stages of undress. He sits bolt upright.

James is distressed to see him in full make up.

PRINCE GEORGE

Donnithorne old chap.

James smiles, mainly at the sexy young girls.

PRINCE GEORGE (CONT'D)

Didn't realise you were just a  
slip of a boy. How old are you  
laddie?

JAMES

Thirteen.

PRINCE GEORGE

And you are the one they sent to  
put me back on the straight and  
narrow?

The Prince laughs and falls back on the bed.

PRINCE GEORGE (CONT'D)

The old fella has really lost it  
this time!

JAMES

I have read extensively, speak  
three different languages, have  
studied all the major classics  
and have a sound understanding of  
anatomy.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

They say I am advanced for my years, His Majesty summoned me to assist you with your studies.

PRINCE GEORGE

My God boy, your balls have barely dropped.

He jumps off the bed and examines the young boy.

PRINCE GEORGE (CONT'D)

Pretty though.

He laps the young lad on the arse. James gulps.

PRINCE GEORGE (CONT'D)

Ever had a wench lad?

JAMES

No sir.

The prince looks to one of the girls.

PRINCE GEORGE

Lily, do us the honour.

Lily giggles and sidles up to James. She kisses him on the lips then turns her back to him and raises her skirt and bends over double showing a bare bottom.

James gulps harder.

PRINCE GEORGE (CONT'D)

Well go on lad - dip in.

James is unsure of what to do, but instinctively goes to unbutton his fly. The prince encourages him. The boy drops his pants. The prince is impressed.

The boy puts his hands on the naked bottom and rams into her. He is torn, it feels good but everyone is watching him. He gets in to a rhythm and is starting to enjoy himself when the woman below him starts screaming. He pulls back.

WENCH

Oh my God, Oh God, oh no, oh God.

The boy stops afraid that he's hurting her.

JAMES

Sorry...

WENCH

No, don't stop, don't stop.

The crowd laughs as the boy starts again gently, gradually gaining momentum as the woman writhes in ecstasy below him. The Prince looks on in amazement as he shows no sign of letting up.

The prince motions to another wench to bend over which she gladly does and flicks his hand to James indicating he should move on.

James moves to the next and within minutes she is orgasming as wildly as the first. James now has four women lined up and is ramming into the final woman, the Prince is very impressed, very drunk and jumps on the bed and starts ordering the boy around like a conductor, with him fucking the bare backside that the prince points to with his pretend baton. The prince reaches a crescendo.

PRINCE GEORGE

Enough! Out with you all now.

The boy doesn't know what to do. He pulls out and starts to button his fly as the girls turn themselves the right way up and dutifully file out of the room. James starts to follow them.

PRINCE GEORGE (CONT'D)

Not you stupid boy.

The Prince jumps off the bed as the door closes and dances round the chamber.

PRINCE GEORGE (CONT'D)

Oh what a jolly jape, whoo hoo, I haven't had that much fun for ages.

He stops in front of the bemused James and licks his lips.

PRINCE GEORGE (CONT'D)

But I hope you've saved the best for last good sir.

The prince unbuckles his belt, lets his pants slip to the floor and bends over double in front of the poor lad.

CUT TO:

INT. ST JAMES' PALACE, THE COURT - AFTERNOON.

TITLE: ST JAMES' PALACE TEN YEARS LATER

A book opens. A book of accounts.

James stands in front of his disgruntled father, he is now a man in his early twenties, but stands like a disinterested school boy.

JAMES'S FATHER

Thirty thousand pounds! Thirty thousand!

James doesn't flinch.

JAMES'S FATHER (CONT'D)

A king's ransom, even a mad one.

James perks up.

JAMES

Did you see him yesterday? He'd been talking for three days straight, his tongue turned blue!

JAMES'S FATHER

Yes, it has been the talk of the court. Among other things.

James flinches.

JAMES

What other things?

James's father mumbles.

JAMES'S FATHER

In his ramblings he claimed to have caught you in a very compromising position with the Prince of Wales. Good job they carted him off.

He stares at the ledger.

JAMES'S FATHER (CONT'D)

And that there's enough evidence of your persuasion right here. How many bastards have you sired?

James mumbles.

JAMES

Six.

His father raises an eyebrow

JAMES (CONT'D)

To my knowledge.

His father clears his throat and stares at a pile of bills.

JAMES'S FATHER

Well, there goes two thousand  
four hundred a year.

He takes a deep sigh.

JAMES'S FATHER (CONT'D)

Only a third of your alcohol  
bill. A quarter of your tailoring  
costs.

He drops the papers in disgust.

JAMES'S FATHER (CONT'D)

What with the parties and the  
carriages and the endless jaunts  
to Europe. Where do you think the  
money's coming from?

James who is now repose on a chaise lounge fops his wrist  
unconcerned.

JAMES

George will be king soon, the  
score will be settled.

JAMES'S FATHER

You think the court is going to  
allow the Prince Regent to  
associate with someone whose  
whispered about?

James still isn't concerned.

JAMES'S FATHER (CONT'D)

There's no smoke without...

James jumps up.

JAMES

You're not insinuating that...

JAMES'S FATHER

I don't know what to think  
anymore. All I know is it is time  
to straighten up and bring some  
honour to the family.

James storms out of the room. James's father shouts after him.

JAMES'S FATHER (CONT'D)

He can't help you now. No one can.

James storms down the corridor and to the princes chambers. Two soldiers stand at the door.

SOLDIER

Can't let you in sir, strict orders.

JAMES

Who is he with?

SOLDIER

Some blokes from parliament sir.

James tries to open the door, but the guards cross their muskets in front of him.

Outside the door James has given up, he walks to the entrance and tries to organise a carriage.

CARRIAGE ATTENDANT.

Sorry sir, strict orders.

James is incensed and marches out of the gates and into the streets.

CUT TO:

INT. SEEDY LONDON PUB - EARLY EVENING.

James finds a bar and a friendly barmaid, opens his wallet and takes out a crisp note, she hands him a jug of ale and a bottle of rum.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHIP - EARLY MORNING.

A bucket of water is thrown, it lands on the sleeping James. He wakes to find a group of weather-beaten sailors laughing at him.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW SOUTH WALES SHORE - DAY.

TITLE: NEW SOUTH WALES 1796

James is dressed as an officer looking out over the tropical shore of Australia, he plots the course on the map and scribbles notes in his journal.

James rows to shore in a small boat, he is greeted at the beach by a crowd of young aboriginal girls, two of which are pregnant. In the bushes a group of warriors in full paint carrying spears lurk.

CUT TO:

EXT. TAHITI - DAY

TITLE: Tahiti 1806

James rows another boat to another tropical shore. A group of Polynesian girls (again in various stages of pregnancy) await him on the shore.

CUT TO:

INT. PALM HUT - DAY.

James is naked in a palm hut with a bevy of naked beauties.

The rattan door rips open. A group of fierce tattooed Islanders rage.

James paddles like crazy to his ship, Islanders in war canoes behind.

CUT TO:

INT. EAST INDIA COMPANY, CALCUTTA, JAMES DONNITHORNE'S OFFICE - MORNING.

TITLE: CALCUTTA 1820

James sits at his desk looking out over the port of Calcutta.

There is a knock at the door.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Enter.

Three solemn looking men walk into the room. One pulls out a parchment.

MAN WITH PARCHMENT

We come as representatives of  
King George IV Monarch of Great  
Britain and the Empire.

James is surprised.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Yes, yes, I know who he is.

One of the men raises an eyebrow. James notices and glares  
at him.

MAN WITH PARCHMENT

He gave orders for you to be the  
new Master of the Mint.

James laughs.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Good old George!

The man who raised an eyebrow is disgusted. James blows him  
a kiss as he leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. GRAND BALLROOM INDIA - NIGHT

James stands at the corner of the grand ballroom, couples  
dance, but he stands alone. A beautiful woman passes him,  
he smiles, she turns cold and turns away. Behind her an  
effeminate man raises an eyebrow.

James sighs heavily and walks out.

EXT. CALCUTTA - NIGHT.

His carriage arrives and he speeds home through the streets  
of Calcutta to his elegant white mansion.

INT. CALCUTTA MANSION - NIGHT.

Inside the mansion is a riot of colour, half a dozen women  
in vivid saris, draped in gold, fuss as he walks through  
the door and up the sweeping staircase.

James runs down the sweeping staircase desperately trying  
to tie his velvet smoking jacket.

Behind him a group of turban clad Indians carrying machetes chase.

CUT TO

EXT. CALCUTTA - NIGHT.

James runs out into the street and jumps on the back of the first carriage he sees.

The enraged Indians jump on horse back.

James climbs round the side of the carriage.

Inside the carriage a beautiful young woman (SARAH 22) looks out of the window and sees the terrified James. She looks out of the back window and sees the Indians gaining. She slides open the window.

SARAH

Why are they chasing you?

JAMES DONNITHORNE

They think I'm sleeping with one of my maids.

SARAH

And are you?

James looks behind, the Indians are approaching.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Not at the moment. No.

Sarah laughs, she opens the door and drags the exhausted James into the carriage, pulls him toward her and kisses him with passion.

CUT TO:

INT. CALCUTTA, JAMES DONNITHORNE'S MANSION - MORNING.

TITLE: SIX YEARS LATER

Sarah lays on a white bed, in a white room, with sheer white curtains and the sunlight dappling through a maze of mosquito nets. In her arms is a new born baby, around her five other children, all under the age of six, cuddle and coo.

James walks in with a trolley table filled with food, pancakes, strawberries, cream, pots of tea and jugs of colourful juices. He smiles the smile of the happiest man in the world.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH, CALCUTTA - MORNING

ELIZA (now five) walks with her elegant family through the streets of Calcutta, beggars line the street, cows roam freely and the bizarre trades in vivid colour.

They reach the steps of a small newly-built church, but Eliza is distracted, in the middle of the square a half naked man, with the longest beard Eliza has ever seen, sits with his legs crossed and his eyes closed in meditation.

Her father ushers her into the church, but she is still distracted by the yogi. His eyes open and stare directly at her.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - CALCUTTA - MORNING

The church is small and sparse, but the pews are filled with British soldiers, businessmen and gentlewomen.

Eliza is bored to tears as the monotone vicar delivers his sermon. She looks around the church, swings her legs back and forth and sighs deeply. Her father gives her an old fashioned look.

After what appears to be an age, the congregation stand for the hymn. Eliza spots the opportunity and darts out the back of the church.

James Donnithorne is a bad singer but a passionate one and doesn't notice her missing till he takes his pew again. He looks around the church in panic, sees that the vicar is stuffing around with his bible pages, ducks and creeps out of the church.

CUT TO:

EXT. CALCUTTA MARKET - MORNING

James is blinded by the bright sunlight as he exits the church.

It takes him a moment or two to gain his focus and sighs deeply as the riot of business of the market stretches out in front of him. He fears it is impossible to find his daughter in such chaos.

But then he spots a large crowd gathered around the old yogi in the centre of the square.

Next to him, ten inches off the ground levitates Eliza.

James watches puzzled for a second, then barges through the crowd and snatches Eliza.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYSORE PALACE - NIGHT.

TITLE: MYSORE PALACE, VIJAYA DASHAMI FESTIVAL. 1832

ELIZA (now 6) turns around in wonder at the sight of the magnificent palace lit by hundreds of torches and bonfires. JAMES, SARAH, TWO ELDER BOYS AND TWO ELDER GIRLS walk through the colourful streets laughing and enjoying the spectacle, not a sign of an English restraint in any of them.

Eliza marvels at the snake charmers and performers, she is lost in a magical world where yogi's levitate and cobras dance.

Her father spots her watching the levitation and holds her hand tighter

A painted demon jumps in her face. She bursts into tears, her father notices, picks her up and puts her on his shoulders.

Her tears soon turn into a beaming smile as a parade of highly decorated elephants ride out of the Palace gates, each with an iridescent goddess riding atop in a golden shrine.

Eliza watches the parade with fascination, as each elephant approaches the painted devils run off into the crowd. Eliza watches as one devil disappears down a dark back alley.

CUT TO:

EXT. FUNERAL PYRES, CALCUTTA - AFTERNOON.

TITLE: ONE WEEK LATER

Flames lick at a pyre, Eliza Donnithorne dressed in black watches in fascination as her mother's face melts like a plastic doll. Her father stands apart from her, a broken man. He looks at not one but three funeral pyres, the bodies of his two eldest girls falling into the flames as the timber poles collapse.

James puts a protective arm around his daughter and they pick their way through a field of funeral pyres with her two elder brothers skipping in the mud behind. People wail and fall to the floor as the emotionless group slowly makes their way past fire after fire, grieving family after grieving family.

Eliza looks round at the vista of burning fires. Demons dance in the rising smoke.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE - MORNING.

TITLE: CAMPERDOWN LODGE. 1836

Eliza is now ten years old, her carriage pulls up at Camperdown Lodge, it is sparkling and new, the gardeners are still laying the turf. At the entrance they are met by the staff, a butler, a cook, a housekeeper, two scullery maids, a couple of stable hands and two very young maids; SARAH a plump homely girl of Eliza's age and POLLY a beautiful 18 year old native girl who looks out of place in a starched uniform. They courtesy to Eliza and whisper to each other as she passes.

They walk through the door and as soon as the staff can't see, Eliza runs through the brand new mansion excitedly, her father follows as she skips through each room with delight. In the banquet hall she jumps under the table and shuffles from one end to the other, pops her head out of the other side and laughs. Her father is lost in her joy.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE LIBRARY - EVENING

James Donnithorne sits at his desk engrossed in a large book.

The door opens and Sarah stands to attention.

SARAH  
Dinner is served sir.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
Oh good, now where's that  
daughter of mine?

SARAH  
Right behind you sir.

Eliza is seated cross legged on the wing chair by the fire  
totally oblivious to anything but the book on her lap.

James laughs.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
Don't you ever get any fresh air?

Eliza looks up absent minded.

ELIZA  
Who needs fresh air when then  
have Homer?

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWTOWN - DAY

TITLE: NEWTOWN. APRIL 1847

Newtown is a colonial town abuzz with new building and  
shiny new shops. ELIZA (NOW 21) walks out of the book shop  
clasping a brown paper package, she clutches it to her  
chest and skips home.

She is breathtakingly beautiful. She stops at a fruit  
barrow on the corner of the street, pulls a handful of  
copper coins from her purse, a young street seller agog  
with her beauty picks out a couple of paw paw and places  
them in a brown paper bag. She is oblivious to his  
bewitchment and rushes off - she just wants to read that  
book.

The town finishes and she skips down the country lane to  
her mansion. Through the shiny gates. Down the gravel drive  
way, past the bull mastiff by the front door and down into  
the kitchen where her two maids are eagerly awaiting.

POLLY  
Did you get it?

Eliza holds up the package and rips off the paper.

ELI  
Wuthering Heights, a novel by  
Ellis Bell in three volumes.  
Volume 1.

She puts the book down on the table as if it is a bar of gold.

She turns the fly leaf and starts reading.

ELIZA  
"1801 - I have just returned from  
a visit with my landlord - the  
solitary neighbour that I shall  
be troubled with".

She points to the words on the page.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
See, written by a woman, what do  
I tell you?

The maids are confused.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
No man would have the perspective  
to understand the notion of a  
negative outcome prior to the  
event.

POLLY  
I've lost you there miss.

Eliza sighs.

ELIZA  
Dear sweet Polly, most men have  
no notion of anything let alone  
the future.

POLLY  
And that is?

ELIZA  
Women being equal to men, if not  
superior, that's what. And not  
only for us privileged few. Girls  
like you will be able to gain an  
education and maybe even one day  
take a career.

The COOK (52 and rotund) walks in carrying a large pot.

COOK  
She's already got one.

She throws the pot in the sink.

COOK (CONT'D)  
Here. Scrub this.

The harsh cook rubs her hands on her grubby white apron.

COOK (CONT'D)  
And you Miss had better get back  
to the library. Master's back  
from the city and he has a young  
gent with him.

Sarah puts her hands behind her back.

SARAH  
And what shall I do?

COOK  
Make her presentable that's what.

Eliza and Sarah scurry out of the kitchen, Sarah fusses at Eliza's curls.

ELIZA  
Stop fussing, if's he's a man of  
merit he will see past a few  
errant tresses.

Sarah stops in her tracks, unsure of what her mistress means, but sure it's an order to stop.

Eliza sweeps open the double doors and sees her father standing by the fire with a chinless young army officer CAPTAIN MONTGOMERY HALL-SMYTHE (26).

James turns and greets his daughter, he is in his mid seventies, still tall, still dashing with long white sideburns the only sign of his accumulating years.

JAMES  
Ah Eliza my dear, so pleased  
you're home. Meet Captain  
Montgomery Hall-Smythe.

Eliza holds her hand out, the perfect young lady.

ELIZA  
Charmed. But Papa I fear I cannot  
stay, I have my class at St.  
Stephens.

James huffs.

JAMES

I don't know why you bother with  
all that nonsense.

Eliza looks skyward.

ELIZA

It is the only avenue available  
for me to better myself.

James looks around at the magnificent display of volumes  
around the walls.

JAMES

We taught you to read English,  
Latin and French. There is a  
volume from every great thinker  
in history here. Why do you need  
more?

ELIZA

I have no one to guide me through  
such lofty concepts.

JAMES

But you have someone to guide you  
through religion, all those rules  
and dogmas.

ELIZA

At least God provides a tutor.

James tuts loudly and turns to the eager young gent.

JAMES

I apologise for my daughter,  
she's read a few volumes and  
seems to have it in her head that  
women are equal in intellect.

The young man laughs politely. Eliza just turns and walks  
out.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I blame it on not having a  
mother's tempering hand.

CUT TO:

INT. ST STEPHENS CHURCH NEWTOWN - AFTERNOON

The young rector smiles as the beautiful Eliza breezes into the sparse church with an arm full of books.

ELIZA  
I've found ten books that start  
with a tree.

The handsome rector looks heavenward for inspiration.

VICAR  
Is that all?

Eliza drops her books loudly on the first pew and sits down crosses her arms and purses her lips.

ELIZA  
As many as I can carry - there  
are hundreds more at home.

She opens the fly sheet of one of the many books.

VICAR  
Incredible isn't it - how many  
works of fiction emulate the  
greatest work of all.

Eliza shakes her head.

ELIZA  
Ah another of your simplistic  
retorts.

VICAR  
The word of God is simple.

Eliza mutters to herself.

ELIZA  
If that's what you want to hear.

The vicar looks around afraid someone might hear her words. An old woman sweeps between the pews at the end of the church.

VICAR  
Eliza, I applaud your enthusiasm.  
It's a beautiful day, let's leave  
the books behind and go and  
discuss the wonder of the  
creator, instead of all this  
heresy.

ELIZA

Heresy? Surely God wouldn't have given us the power of reason if he had not wanted us to use it.

VICAR

And what of faith?

The vicar gives her a disapproving nod. Eliza reluctantly shuts up, stands up and the two of them walk down the aisle through the dappled light from the stain glass windows.

They walk down the path past the graveyard.

VICAR (CONT'D)

Eliza, you really do read too much.

ELIZA

I've read the bible four times and the old testament six, Is that too much?

VICAR

I'm not saying don't read, I'm saying don't read so much into what you read.

ELIZA

Ah, so blind faith is compulsory.

VICAR

It would be a much simpler path.

ELIZA

Simpler? Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel.

VICAR

Not this again.

ELIZA

Well, where do the rest of us come from then?

VICAR

It's allegory.

ELIZA

That's what you always say when you can't explain something.

(MORE)

ELIZA (CONT'D)

It's not allegory it's code. The bible's full of it. All those cubits and measurements, the continuous rattling off of names, the locations, the snakes, the numbers the letters.

VICAR

And what of this code?

ELIZA

How should I know? I'm just a woman, I'm not privy to that kind of information. But I see it in the writings of the great men and women.

VICAR

Women writing?

ELIZA

Yes, lots of women are writing, using nom de plumes.

VICAR

Ah Eliza that imagination of yours.

Eliza looks at him defiantly.

ELIZA

And where's yours? Do you truly believe everything the church tells you?

VICAR

No, I believe everything God tells me.

They both stop and look at the new town being built around them, carts and carriages rush back and forth to various building sites. Young boys carry hods of bricks up rickety ladders. Army officers scream at gangs of convicts.

A young man (GEORGE CUTHBERTSON 22) on horseback rides up to one of the officers hands over a missive and turns the horse quickly - he's in a rush.

He stops as he sees Eliza and takes his hat off in greeting pulling at the reins of the horse so it rears. Then gallops down the street twirling his hat and whooping.

Eliza barely notices the brash young man, she is elsewhere.

ELIZA

How can you be sure?

VICAR

There are many things beyond  
comprehension. I had an epiphany  
as a young boy

ELIZA

Epiphany?

The vicar looks away abashed. Eliza urges him on.

VICAR

I was called in a dream, I saw  
myself at the head of a church  
and I knew the path God wanted me  
to follow.

Eliza bursts into laughter.

ELIZA

That's it?

The vicar is highly offended and highly embarrassed.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

That's the source of your  
absolute certainty?

The vicar really doesn't know why Eliza's so amused.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Goodness gracious man, when I was  
a child I dreamt I was an Indian  
goddess.

The vicar doesn't see her logic.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

You don't see me astride a  
caparisoned beast do you?

The vicar has no idea what she's talking about.

VICAR

A what?

CUT TO:

EXT. GEORGE STREET, SYDNEY- LATE AFTERNOON

The young man gallops down the busy city street dodging carts and traders. He pulls up quickly dismounts and runs into a large hotel.

BENJAMIN DICKENS stands behind the bar, he is in his late forties, fat and balding. He reads a book oblivious to the cavalier young man strutting toward him.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Give me a flagon of your finest  
ale.

Benjamin puts the book down and pulls the beer from a wooden cask. He plonks it down on the bar.

BENJAMIN  
You're in high spirits today.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
I just met my future wife.

BENJAMIN  
Really? That's the third one this  
year.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
No this is it this time, I saw  
her today - a vision in lilac on  
King Street, Newtown.

BENJAMIN  
A country girl hey? Tell me what  
is her name?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
I have absolutely no idea, but  
she was with the vicar of St.  
Stephens.

Benjamin isn't interested and picks up his book again.

BENJAMIN  
Guess you'll be going to church  
on Sunday.

George is at a loss for words, he wants to talk, Benjamin is engrossed. George turns his head to read the cover.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
A Christmas Carol? But it's  
March.

Benjamin doesn't look up.

BENJAMIN

And it takes 100 days to get here  
by ship.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Why not save it for the season?

Benjamin is annoyed. George keeps staring at book he reads  
the title

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

Dickens hey? Is he some kind of  
relative?

BENJAMIN

Listen. I'll sit here and read my  
book in peace while you drink  
your ale and dream of your  
wedding night.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, MISS DONNITHORNE'S CHAMBERS -  
EVENING.

Eliza is luxuriating in a tub, her maids are sitting on the  
side of the bath enthralled as she reads from Wuthering  
Heights.

ELIZA

It would degrade me to marry  
Heathcliff now; so he shall never  
know how I love him; and that,  
not because he's handsome, Nelly,  
but because

Eliza lays back and sighs.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

His and mine are the same. She  
writes so beautifully, she knows  
what a woman's heart yearns for.

SARAH

And what of the gentleman your  
father had round before?

ELIZA

Another of his English twits,  
straight off the boat.

Eliza stands, her maids are not expecting it and rush to get the towels.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 I don't need some chinless  
 wonder. I desire my own  
 Heathcliff, a dark-skinned gypsy  
 in aspect, in dress and manners a  
 gentleman.

Eliza runs her hands over her naked body.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 And undressed - pure animal.

The maids are shocked and quickly cover her with their towels.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH, NEWTOWN - MORNING

George is in his Sunday best and is early for church. The crowds pass him at the gates, it is a sunny day and the street is filled with women carrying pastel coloured sun shades.

George spots Eliza walking arm in arm with her father, her two maids bustling behind. He keeps his distance.

The vicar stands at the entrance greeting the congregation. He smiles as Eliza approaches.

VICAR  
 Mr. Donnithorne, Miss Donnithorne  
 so nice to see you.

Mr. Donnithorne barges through.

VICAR (CONT'D)  
 Glad you didn't come on elephant  
 back.

Eliza laughs.

ELIZA  
 Ah so you've been studying.

VICAR  
 Yes it has been known -  
 particularly after our classes.

Eliza looks smug and waltzes into the church. George follows and sits a respectable distance apart and gazes at her beauty.

The vicar stands up at the lectern.

VICAR (CONT'D)

Before we start today's lesson, I would like to invite Miss Eliza Donnithorne to lead the choir in a new piece created by the celebrated Hungarian composer Franz Liszt.

The crowd fuss as Eliza rises from her seat and floats to the pulpit. The organist starts a rousing introduction.

Eliza sings with the grace of an angel. George is spell bound.

ELIZA (SINGING)

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum;  
 benedicta tu in mulieribus,  
 et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus [Christus].  
 Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,  
 ora pro nobis peccatoribus,  
 nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.  
 Amen.

Eliza's sweet voice has brought the congregation to tears. Her father pats at his eyes with his kerchief as Eliza resumes her place next to him.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

You are the image of your mother.

Eliza pats his hand as he blows loudly into the kerchief.

Outside the church George waits eagerly as Eliza chats with the vicar and the other constituents, she finally walks past him and he blurts out.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Your singing was divine.

Eliza nods in appreciation and carries on walking politely. George wants to follow but stops himself as Mr. Donnithorne takes Eliza's elbow and hurries her along.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Come come, Eliza I have a surprise for you.

ELIZA  
How exciting papa, what is it?

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
A guest.

ELIZA  
Oh who papa who?

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
Mrs. MacArthur.

ELIZA  
I must hasten then.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
Why? She wont be here for a couple more hours.

ELIZA  
Perfect, I'll have time to finish.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
Finish what?

ELIZA  
Wuthering Heights of course, I am sure she will have read it.

Eliza skips ahead.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, BANQUET HALL - LATE AFTERNOON.

Mr Donnithorne sits on one side of the enormous table. Mrs. MacArthur is on the other. She is 80 years old yet still stunningly beautiful and refined.

Mrs MacArthur takes a small spoon of dessert and savours the taste. She swallows and dabs her mouth with her serviette before speaking.

MRS. MACARTHUR.  
What is this again?

ELIZA  
Paw paw.

She looks over at her father who is tucking in with gusto.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Father got the taste of it when he charted the tropics. Claims it to be his sole reason for retiring here.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Oh come James the colony has much more to offer. Especially for dear Eliza here. Have you found her a suitable husband yet?

James finally puts his spoon down.

JAMES

Alas no. What is an old widower to do? I have no idea what a young lass is looking for in a man these days.

Mrs. Mac Arthur laughs.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Oh James , that never changes. A woman of Eliza's age is only looking for one thing. Love.

JAMES

And how do I find it for her?

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Oh you can't find love for her. But you can place a few suitable candidates in the way.

JAMES

I fear I let her down greatly in that regard. I'm an old man, what do I know of love?

MRS. MACARTHUR.

I suspect you know more than you give yourself credit. You have a devoted daughter, surely she gives you delight?

James smiles at Eliza.

JAMES

Ah yes.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

And her mother?

James looks away, she's touched on a nerve, but his face softens at the memory of Sarah.

JAMES

There is not a lexicon on this earth that contains the words to express the magnificence of that woman.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Eliza deserves no less. Now James, leave us alone, let me discover her desires and I'll see if I can whip up a young lad to whisk her off her feet.

JAMES

If it is not an inconvenience for you.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

You're giving an old lady a chance to talk of such matters as love and romance. Retreat to your library and have a cigar for me.

James gets up from the table.

JAMES

Don't stay amongst all this mess, it is delightful in the drawing room this time of the afternoon.

The two women rise gracefully from the table.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Maybe Eliza could allow you to hear the sublime hymn she sang at church this morning.

ELIZA

I'm sure Mrs. MacArthur doesn't want to hear my warblings.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

She's right. Been to church this morning - don't need evensong too.

James bows and heads to his retreat.

MRS. MACARTHUR. (CONT'D)

Now Eliza, let's set about finding you a husband.

They walk into the drawing room.

INT. DRAWING ROOM -AFTERNOON.

Eliza and Mrs. Macarthur enter the bright and sunny room that leads to lush gardens. They seat themselves comfortably on the floral sofas.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

So what are you looking for?

ELIZA

Tall, dark, strong, wild - yet a gentleman...

Mrs. MacArthur stops her.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Sweet Eliza, you're not Catherine and you don't want a Heathcliff. Believe me I had one, dark and brooding is beguiling in the first blooms of love. It holds no charms for your middle years.

Eliza nods.

MRS. MACARTHUR. (CONT'D)

Enough of this modern rubbish - all that running over the moors with no self respect. Stick with the classics. This is more of a Sir Gawain and Lady Ragnall proposition.

ELIZA

Do I know them?

MRS. MACARTHUR.

You haven't read the Arthurian legends?

Eliza is shamed.

MRS. MACARTHUR. (CONT'D)

So you do not know that the greatest wish of all women is her sovereignty?

ELIZA

A woman can have her own will?

MRS. MACARTHUR.  
If she marries right.

Eliza is gobsmacked.

MRS. MACARTHUR. (CONT'D)  
So what do you want out of life?

ELIZA  
I want to get married and read my books.

MRS. MACARTHUR.  
That's it?

ELIZA  
Well, church on Sunday, and my lessons with the vicar and walks, I love my walks. Oh and children of course.

Mrs. MacArthur looks heavenward.

MRS. MACARTHUR.  
Is that the extent of your dreams?

ELIZA  
Well, I'd like to travel, but everywhere's so far from here.

MRS. MACARTHUR.  
Eliza, Eliza we are building a Utopia here and you just want to sit in the middle lost in prose? The natives call this the land of the dreaming and it works. But you have to put in the spade work. Dream big young lady all you need is a husband to be the public face of those dreams.

ELIZA  
But my dream is to have a proper education.

MRS. MACARTHUR.  
You can read can't you?

Eliza nods.

MRS. MACARTHUR. (CONT'D)  
Everything else is rhetoric.

ELIZA

But I wish to go to university.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Here you go again with your romantic notions. You know an education for you is impossible. But what of your daughters and their daughters? There will come a time when learning is open to all. But only if women like us plant the seed.

ELIZA

But how do I start?

MRS. MACARTHUR.

By finding a good man who will champion your sovereignty.

ELIZA

That's it?

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Marriage will give you freedoms you had never dreamt possible but only if you find the right man.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSHOP, NEWTOWN - MORNING

Eliza rushes to the book store. She barely notices George Cuthbertson as she bristles past.

The bell rings as she opens the door and the older lady (BOOK SHOP ASSISTANT) behind the counter tries to greet Eliza, but she walks straight to the shelves.

Eliza reaches for a volume - L'Mort d'Arthur. She doesn't notice George enter and hide behind the shelves as she walks to the counter and puts the book down.

The older woman behind the counter picks the book from the counter. George looks on from behind the pages of a large volume.

BOOK SHOP ASSISTANT

We have a new translation if you'd prefer.

ELIZA

I'm partial to the original  
french, you lose so many nuances  
otherwise.

The woman starts to wrap the book.

BOOK SHOP ASSISTANT

Ah Miss Eliza, you are a breath  
of fresh air around these parts.

Eliza smiles politely.

ELIZA

Tell me, does this contain the  
wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame  
Ragnell?

The shop assistant smiles and scurries from around the  
counter.

BOOK SHOP ASSISTANT

Aww the knight that solves the  
eternal riddle of what a woman  
wants, ahh. That is one of the  
older myths, I think it is among  
these penny titles.

She rummages through pamphlets in piles on a table.

BOOK SHOP ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

Here we go, Miss Eliza, lovely  
tale, one of my favourites,  
perfect for a woman considering  
marriage.

The old book shop owner sighs.

BOOK SHOP ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

Only wish more gents would read  
it - especially round here.

Eliza smiles, drops some silver coins from her purse and  
leaves.

CUT TO:

INT. RED LION HOTEL, GEORGE STREET - EVENING

The brash young George sits on a stool at the bar. Benjamin  
is gruff as always.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
A flagon of ale good man.

Benjamin starts to pour. George places a package on the counter and opens it. Inside are two books, the English translation of the Death of Arthur and the penny pamphlet containing the tale of Sir Gawain. He flicks to the end and starts reading.

BENJAMIN  
So this new wife of yours is a reader then. Know the wenches name yet?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Miss Eliza Donnithorne, the fairest maiden in the new world.

BENJAMIN  
And the daughter of James Donnithorne good friend of the late George IV.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
You know them?

BENJAMIN  
I own a hotel, I've heard of every scandal that has hit this colony since they let me out of the stocks.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
A scandal you say?

BENJAMIN  
They say her father was more than good friends with the king if you get my drift.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
But the king has been dead for years.

BENJAMIN  
Why do you think Donnithorne's here? He was high up in India at his majesties bequest. Two years after the gluttonous pig carks it Donnithorne leaves public life. You put two and two together. But I tell you - you are wasting your time.

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

That daughter is his princess,  
scandal or not, he is a gentleman  
of high birth and so is she -  
she'd never look twice at a clerk  
like you.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Unless I knew what she was  
looking for.

He waves the pamphlet in the air.

BENJAMIN

And what would that be young man?

George tries to pronounce the word.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Sovereenaty.

Benjamin walks away shaking his head.

BENJAMIN

Good luck mate, you'll need it.

CUT TO:

INT -CHURCH HALL NIGHT

Eliza walks into the church hall with her maids, the choir  
is gathering in their pews, the vicar runs up and greets  
them enthusiastically.

VICAR

Oh Miss Eliza I am so thrilled  
you could join us this evening,  
there's a new chap joining the  
choir tonight, riding all the way  
in from the city.

George pulls his horse up with his usual flamboyance.

VICAR (CONT'D)

Here he is now.

George strides up beaming in anticipation of meeting Eliza.

VICAR (CONT'D)

Eliza, meet George Cuthbertson,  
George Cuthbertson, Miss Eliza  
Donnnithorne.

Eliza holds her out politely. James kisses it eagerly and looks up at her.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

After hearing you sing on Sunday  
I knew this to be the only choir  
for me.

VICAR

And we are very honoured- he has  
a strong voice.

Eliza isn't impressed.

ELIZA

Well, lets hear it then.

CUT TO:

INT.CHARLES DICKENS' STUDY - NIGHT.

TITLE: GAD HILL JUNE 1861

Charles Dickens stirs, Nelly doesn't notice. He sees she is reading his private letter and is incensed till he sees the enjoyment and concentration on her face.

He moves. She jumps, tries to hide the pages which are sprewn everywhere, then looks at him with as much innocence as she can muster.

CHARLES

What are you doing?

NELLY

I saw you were posting your copy  
to Miss Donnithorne, I was  
concerned you had taken a new  
muse.

CHARLES

Ah the old green eyed monster.

NELLY

But I was right wasn't I?

CHARLES

I've never even met the woman.

NELLY

Quite obviously.

CHARLES

I told you, it's just gossip and  
tittle tattle.

NELLY

That you listened to apparently.

CHARLES

I beg your pardon?

NELLY

Oh come on Miss Donnithorne is so  
much more than just a character -  
you've stolen her whole life. The  
parallels are transparent. Look  
at Pip and Herbert's high life  
and debts compared to those of  
Eliza's father and the Prince  
Regent? And didn't your cousin  
Benjamin run a hotel in the city?

CHARLES

Mere coincidence.

NELLY

But the man who jilted Miss  
Haversham was Compeyson and Miss  
Donnithorne meets Cuthbertson. I  
haven't got to the wedding scene,  
but I bet the clocks stop at  
twenty to nine. Am I right?

CHARLES

Where have you read to?

NELLY

She's just met the cad.

CHARLES

Well you will never know then.

He gathers up the mess of papers and stuffs them in his top  
drawer, locks it and puts the key in his top pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. GAD HILL, BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Charles lays on Nelly pumping the last strokes of what has  
been a lackluster performance. He rolls over and falls  
asleep immediately.

Nelly lays there for a while, checks he's sleeping then goes to the chair and takes the key from his top pocket.

She takes a candle from the night stand and walks back to his study, opens the drawer recovers the letter then cuddles up on the sofa and finds her page

CUT TO:

INT. ST STEPHENS CHURCH, NEWTOWN - EVENING

George stands in front of the choir and hands out scores to each member. Sarah and Polly, Eliza's maids, stand in the back row and are quite smitten by the handsome newcomer.

When everyone has their sheets, he motions to the organist to play.

Eliza watches in fascination as the brash young man takes his first breath.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (SINGING)

Amazing grace, how sweet the  
sound  
That sav'd a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am  
found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

George looks over at Eliza who is pretending not to be spell bound, but his graceful voice fills the church and sends chills down her spine.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (SINGING)

(CONT'D)

'Twas grace that taught my heart  
to fear,  
And grace my fears reliev'd;  
How precious did that grace  
appear,  
The hour I first believ'd!

Sarah and Polly are completely smitten, as is the rest of the choir, who completely miss their entrance - they are so entranced.

They are just about to start again when the doors open and a young lad carrying a lantern enters and stands at the back of the hall.

Eliza and both the maids start moving.

ELIZA

I'm afraid we have to leave, my  
father has sent the torch bearer.

George can't hide his disappointment at her sudden departure. George picks up his satchel and holds out his hand to farewell the vicar.

VICAR

It is late and dark, why not  
share an ale with me in the  
vestry and make your way at day  
break?

George smiles as Eliza sneaks once last furtive glance at him and closes the heavy wooden door.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWTOWN - NIGHT

The young stable hand leads the way in the dark.

ELIZA

It's only a short walk, we do it  
daily, I am sure we could pick  
our way home without the lantern.

STABLEHAND

But you never know what lurks in  
the dark miss.

Eliza senses he is anxious.

ELIZA

Like the bunyip, dark ferocious  
creatures with walrus like horns -  
and blood- curdling cries heard  
at night as they devour their  
sickly prey.

In the distance Maverick lets out a greeting. The stable hand almost jumps out of his skin. Eliza is highly amused. But stops laughing as Polly mumbles.

POLLY

Rainbow serpent got rid of all  
the bunyips, brought the cold,  
all of them died.

The stable hand still shakes as he carries the lantern up the driveway. Eliza stops.

ELIZA

You know the legends?

POLLY

Only a few miss, there aren't many of my people round these parts no more.

ELIZA

But you've heard some?

POLLY

Yes my Mother told me the creation story before the pox got her too.

Eliza hurries the servants along much to the stable hand's relief.

ELIZA

Come, lets' get some hot milk, you can tell me all about it, a rainbow serpent you say? Is there a tree?

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, LIBRARY - MORNING

Eliza skips into her father's library.

ELIZA

Come papa it's a lovely day let's take a stroll.

JAMES

There is a chill in the air, you run along by yourself, I'm sure all the new shops in King Street will bring you some amusement.

ELIZA

But papa, Polly's been telling me the creation tales from her people. You won't find that in any of your books.

JAMES

After the great flood, the sun goddess Yhi, mother nature Nungeena and Punjel the architect of the universe called a gathering at moon lake.

ELIZA

Father you constantly surprise me, how do you know of such things?

JAMES

Mr. Squire's tavern in Kissing Point, visited there a number of times on my first visits. Mr Squire had a friend Bennelong I think the chaps name was. Buy him a pint and he'd tell you the dream time legends. Shout him a yard and he'd give you the secrets of the universe.

ELIZA

Are you are still in touch?

JAMES

Eliza, this was thirty years ago. Bennelong is long gone, word has it he drowned in one of Mr. Squires vats. Can't think of a better way to go.

ELIZA

Oh Papa do tell me more.

JAMES

Sweetness I am seven score and four, my memories are unreliable. Now you run out and enjoy the sun, winter will be with us soon.

ELIZA

But aren't you interested in the architect of the universe? Aren't you the slightest bit fascinated by sacred geometry?

Eliza looks at all the books on the walls, her eyes settle squarely on one section, high above everything else, a group of books all displaying symbols of a square and compass.

James looks a little flustered.

JAMES

I wouldn't know of such things. Run along, I shall nap here in front of the fire.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEWTOWN - DAY.

Eliza gets to the end of the long gravel driveway and ponders her direction, on one side the town, on the other a creek leading to acres of fields. She heads to the fields, takes a book from her basket and reads as she ambles down the road.

George Cuthbertson lays in wait for her down the street, but when he sees her turn in the opposite direction he has to rethink his plan.

He jumps on his horse and gallops at breakneck speed down the road, pulling on the reins as he approaches her. The horse rears, he lands at Eliza's feet as the horse speeds off over the open fields.

ELIZA

Oh my goodness Sir, are you hurt?

George looks up and smiles at her.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Oh I'll have a couple of bruises here and there, I am more concerned for my steed.

They watch the horse cavorting in the fields ahead. George gets up but pretends to be lame.

Without saying a word, Eliza hands him her basket and runs up the road, jumps over the fence and quietly walks up to the horse that is now grazing, the horse walks straight to her and nuzzles her out stretched hand.

George looks on with tenderness, then surprise as she hitches up her dress and mounts the steed. She grabs the reins, kicks him hard and gallops across the field to jump over the stone wall and clatter down the lane to reach the astonished George.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT (CONT'D)

You are a surprising woman Miss Donnithorne.

Eliza dismounts.

ELIZA

Can you pop on? I'll walk you back to town.

She holds out her hands to give him a leg up then takes the reins, picks up her basket and clicks the horse forward.

George looks at the book in the basket and smiles.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
So you're on a grail quest then?

Eliza looks at him with amazement.

ELIZA  
How do you know such things?

George nods toward the book in the basket.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
The death of Arthur.

ELIZA  
So you know the legend of the  
grail, but do you comprehend its  
meaning?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Alas fair maiden, no noble knight  
am I.

Eliza looks disappointed.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
Can't even stay atop on a  
straight road. What good would I  
be in the heat of battle?

ELIZA  
But you could have been a knight.  
Do you believe in reincarnation  
Mr. Cuthbertson?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
I haven't given the matter much  
thought.

ELIZA  
I was raised in India, it's  
matter of course over there. I am  
currently wondering if  
reincarnation is the secret to  
eternal life.

George is taken aback, he is puzzled by her strange line of  
questioning but finds a response.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
I am of the opinion that one  
shouldn't concern themselves with  
matters of the afterlife.  
(MORE)

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
Not till you get there anyway.

ELIZA  
But surely one should be  
prepared?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
And what better preparation than  
living a full and happy existence  
in the here and now.

ELIZA  
But we can't all live in the  
moment.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Why not?

ELIZA  
Who would create the future?

Eliza has a good point and George has no answer. Eliza leads the horse slowly and in silence.

They arrive in town, Eliza ties the horse to a railing then walks off in a daze not even bidding George goodbye. He watches a menacing grin across his face.

CUT TO:

INT. MASONIC LODGE, SYDNEY - NIGHT.

James Donnithorne walks into the bustling hall that looks like a gentleman's club except for the fact that all the gentlemen are wearing elaborate aprons. He is greeted by GREENWAY a well coiffed and colourfully dressed man a few years his younger.

GREENWAY  
Donnithorne old chap, haven't  
seen you at the lodge for a  
while.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
Bit of a trek from the wilds of  
Newtown. See you got the new  
aprons.

He holds out his apron like a housemaid curtsying in her pinny.

GREENWAY

Finally got the design right - you have no idea how misguided my memory is of late. However, with the influx of female settlers the embroidery standards have improved greatly. Can't do this without having the geometry right can we?

Greenway winks at James then looks over the room and spots a rather portly and effeminate man (QUENTIN HYDE) George Cuthbertson has his back to us and is the only man in the room without an apron.

GREENWAY (CONT'D)

Oh look, Hyde's at it again.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Who?

Greenway looks over in disgust.

GREENWAY

Quentin Hyde, convict of the Shipley arraigned for buggery. Got a leave of absence on arrival due to his accountancy skills.

He looks George up and down.

GREENWAY (CONT'D)

With him is yet another in a long line of impressionable young clerks he's attempting to initiate into the fraternity - in more ways than one.

James looks at the two men with interest, at a certain angle the man bears a striking resemblance to Prince George. Quentin notices and minces over to James who tries to look away.

CUT TO:

INT.CAMPERDOWN LODGE KITCHEN - MORNING.

Eliza walks into the kitchen to find all the staff sitting round the large kitchen table enjoying a pot of tea and gossip. They all sit upright as Miss Donnithorne enters the room.

ELIZA

What are you all doing?

COOK

The master stayed in town miss,  
with no breakfast the chores got  
done mighty quick.

ELIZA

Papa's in town?

COOK

Yes miss left last night. Would  
you like us to serve you  
breakfast?

Eliza is distracted.

ELIZA

Later, maybe.

She walks out the kitchen and runs to her father's library.

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE LIBRARY - MORNING

Eliza opens the door like a thief and looks up at the  
seemingly inaccessible books with the technical instruments  
embossed on the spine.

She pulls the library ladder as far as she can and climbs  
it with a flourish.

She reaches the top step, but the desired volumes still  
appear out of reach. Eliza is determined, she stands on tip  
toes perched atop the ladder and stretches her arm as far  
as she can.

Her fingertips touch one of the scared volumes and with  
great difficulty she manages to pull the leather bound  
volume from the pack. Slowly she inches the book from the  
shelf leaning precariously.

She leans an inch too far, the ladder shoots off and Eliza  
falls to the ground, the heavy volume landing atop her.

Eliza gently removes the book and looks down at her badly  
bent and very broken leg. The servant's bell is beyond  
reach and she is about to cry out when she notices diagrams  
in the open book.

Fighting back tears of agony and fuelled by her incessant  
desire for knowledge Eliza scans the pages.

CUT TO:

INT.CAMPERDOWN LODGE ENTRANCE HALL - MORNING.

James Donnithorne storms through the front door in a black cloud. Cook quickly runs to greet him smoothing down her white pinafore.

COOK  
 Good morning sir, would you like  
 breakfast now sir?

Donnithorne barely looks at her, he just scowls and storms down the corridor.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
 I am in no mood for breakfast, I  
 am retiring to the library, I  
 shall ring if I need anything.

COOK  
 Should I make a pot pie for lunch  
 sir?

Donnithorne barks.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
 I said I would ring if I need  
 anything.

Cook scurries back to the kitchen.

INT.KITCHEN - MORNING

Cook walks in hands on her hips huffing and puffing.

COOK  
 Don't know what's got into him  
 this morning. In a right foul  
 mood he is. Wouldn't even tell me  
 what he wanted for lunch, just  
 shuffled into the library saying  
 he'd 'ring' if he needed  
 anything.

She walks to the sink and starts scrubbing a perfectly clean pot.

COOK (CONT'D)  
 It won't be pot pie he gets to  
 eat, it will damn well be pot  
 luck.

The other girls giggle at cooks hissy fit.

COOK (CONT'D)  
I'll ring you if I need  
anything...

The servants bell rings, the cook shuts up immediately,  
takes a big deep breath and walks out of the kitchen with a  
forced smile on her face.

CUT TO:

INT. SUNROOM CAMPERDOWN LODGE

Eliza sits on a bath chair, a rug over her heavily  
bandaged and splinted leg, she turns to see who has entered  
the room, it is her father, she turns back and pretends to  
be watching the view.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
So curiosity finally killed the  
cat.

ELIZA  
Oh I wouldn't say that, maybe  
lost one of her nine lives  
though.

James sits on the chair next to her.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
So you know then.

ELIZA  
What?

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
That I'm in the lodge.

ELIZA  
Oh I've always known that, all  
those weird handshakes over the  
years.

James isn't sure how to take her.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
You noticed.

ELIZA  
Yes I could name every Freemason  
from here to Calcutta just by the  
position of the third finger of  
his right hand.

James is actually very impressed.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
You're too clever for your own  
good my girl.

ELIZA  
Well it's your fault, they say  
clever men who marry pretty women  
end up with pretty sons and  
clever daughters.

James laughs.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
I owe you an apology.

ELIZA  
Oh no Papa, it's me who should be  
begging forgiveness. You always  
say a civilised society survives  
by everyone knowing their place,  
I over stepped mine.

James smiles.

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
Ah sweet Eliza, I think you're  
wise enough now to know the  
conclusion to that saying; A  
civilised society truly does  
survive by everyone knowing their  
place, but a civilised society  
evolves by the few courageous  
souls who don't.

Eliza is speechless. James takes a small volume and hands it to her gently. Eliza looks at the embossing on the cover, the square and compass and the words; 'The Volume of Sacred Law' Eliza looks at her father in disbelief.

ELIZA  
But Papa it's forbidden for a  
woman to read such texts. Won't  
you be excommunicated or  
something?

JAMES DONNITHORNE  
Oh I'm too old for all of that.  
And it seems they'll let anyone  
in these days.

He stands to leave, Eliza is still confused by her fathers actions. James touches the side of her face and looks her straight in the eye with a twinkle in his.

JAMES DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
 And if they can share the secrets  
 with any of their pretty sons,  
 why can't I share it with my  
 extremely clever daughter.

His face clouds. Then beams with love and joy.

JAMES DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
 But not a word to anyone  
 understand.

James heads for the door as he opens it Polly is standing on the other side, they give each other a shock.

POLLY  
 There's someone from the church  
 to see you miss.

ELIZA  
 Oh tell the vicar not today.

Eliza has a book to read she doesn't want visitors.

POLLY  
 Oh it's not the vicar miss, it's  
 that baritone from choir.

Eliza looks interested.

ELIZA  
 Oh well let him in.

James Donnithorne looks displeased.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 But do stay with us Polly, an  
 unchaperoned visit would be  
 highly inappropriate for a woman  
 in my position.

James Donnithorne is happy and walks off.

Eliza sniggers

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 I can't exactly run if me makes a  
 pass at me.

Polly giggles and skips to the front door. Eliza hides her book under her blanket.

Eliza looks up to see George awkwardly standing at the door, his face hidden by a bouquet of the most magnificent white lilies.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
Were you expecting a funeral?

George doesn't know what to say.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
Lilies, they're the funeral  
flower.

George is embarrassed.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
I thought roses too forthright,  
and carnations too common. I  
guess I got it wrong again.

Eliza smiles and holds her hand out to receive the blooms.

George hands her the lilies and Eliza sniffs their fragrance.

ELIZA  
As the lily among the thorns.  
What is the lily? It is the  
congregation of Israel. Because  
there is a lily; and there is the  
lily.

Cutherbertson is enchanted.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
That's beautiful, where's it  
from?

ELIZA  
Oh one of papa's books,  
apparently it was Isaac Newton's  
favourite, Papa read everything  
Mr. Newton studied. And  
consequently so have I.

Eliza examines the perfect bloom. George examines the perfect Eliza.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
So we share a love of calculus.

Eliza laughs.

ELIZA

An understanding of mathematics is necessary. A love of the subject however, is for engineers, architects and book keepers alone.

Eliza glances at George.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Which are you?

George bows his head.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Alas the lowly book keeper, but not for long, I have come to this fair land to make my fortune, this is the only place on earth where a man can become a gentleman, not by the circumstances of his birth but by the contents of his heart.

Eliza gives him a knowing look.

ELIZA

So you don't always live in the here and now.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Oh no I have dreams, wild vivid dreams.

ELIZA

Prey do tell.

George looks abashed.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

You will not think me foolish.

ELIZA

Of course that what dreams are. Foolish follies to brighten up this drab existence.

George is nervous and then looks straight at her with all earnestness.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

I dream of you.

Polly stifles a giggle in the corner of the room. Eliza smiles with the corner of her mouth and stares at George intently.

ELIZA  
It takes a brave soul to make his  
dreams come true.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE SUNROOM.

TITLE: The next day.

Miss Donnithorne is entranced in the book of freemasonry, there is a knock on the door. She stuffs the book down the side of the sofa.

Polly opens the door.

POLLY  
It's that fella again, shall I  
let him in?

Eliza looks out of the window, a magpie swoops down and settles on the lawn.

ELIZA (TO HERSELF)  
One for sorrow.

She is about to turn when another lands and joins it, she smiles broadly

ELIZA (TO HERSELF) (CONT'D)  
And two for joy.

She turns to Polly.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
Absolutely.

Polly scuttles out of the room. Eliza gazes out of the window as the magpies are joined by a young grey magpie.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
One for a girl hey?

George knocks on the door and opens it in his hand is a single white warratah bloom. He approaches Eliza and hands it to her silently. She takes the bloom and examines its unfamiliarity.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
 It's the perfect flower for you  
 my lady.

Eliza looks at him quizzically.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
 A flower with a story to tell.

Eliza smiles and motions to the arm chair.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
 Korrobori the spirit woman flew  
 across the universe, she created  
 this world as a place to rest.  
 Then she created two sisters to  
 tend the beautiful world of trees  
 and plants. Wurrata, the  
 Beautiful One, and Wiridjiribin,  
 the Rememberer. Korrobori showed  
 the sisters all around the world,  
 and taught them which plants they  
 could use for food, medicine, and  
 other things.  
 But soon Korrobori had to return  
 home, the sisters were saddened,  
 and begged her not to leave.  
 Korrobori took her magic staff  
 and planted it into the ground.  
 It turned into a beautiful white  
 flower. She named it Miwa Gawaiian

Eliza is brought back from the trance of the story.

ELIZA  
 So it's a Miwa Gawaiian. Gawaiian  
 you say? How do you spell it?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
 Oh I don't think there's a way to  
 spell it. It's commonly known as  
 the White Waratah.

ELIZA  
 Oh I much prefer the uncommon  
 moniker.

She stares at the oddly beautiful flower.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 Miwa Gawaiian. This means more to  
 me than you could know.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Truly? Do tell me.

ELIZA  
Oh it's nothing really, I just  
like the sound of it.

Eliza turns to Polly.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
Be a good girl and pop this in  
some water for me.

Polly is unsure but follows Eliza's prompt. As soon as the  
door is closed George moves closer to Eliza.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
So now I have you alone.

ELIZA  
For a couple of minutes anyway.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Please share with me the content  
of your dreams.

Eliza laughs.

ELIZA  
In a couple of minutes? You'll  
need a couple of days for my  
imaginings.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE

TITLE: The next day.

George walks into the room with the biggest bunch of wild  
and ragged flowers, he can barely hold them there are so  
many.

ELIZA  
Wild flowers today?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
That can be tamed.

Eliza looks at Polly impassively.

ELIZA  
See what you can do with them  
Polly.

George almost hugs Polly as she is overwhelmed by the oversized posy, he opens the door and she staggers out.

George rubs his hands together and seats himself on the maid's stool right next to Eliza.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Well that should buy me enough  
time to hear your craziest dream  
at least.

ELIZA  
And why should I divulge that?

George looks into her eyes with passion and a little humility.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Well I've shared mine haven't I?

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE SUNROOM - AFTERNOON.

Polly stands at the door.

POLLY  
Mr. Cuthbertson's here again  
miss.

Eliza can't hide her excitement.

ELIZA  
Let him in.

George enters the room full of the joys of spring.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
It is such a beautiful day shall  
we go for a walk?

ELIZA  
Only in our imaginations I'm  
afraid.

She looks down at her bandaged foot.

George stands behind her and lifts the bath chair off the ground. Looking over his shoulder to Polly.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Grab some shawls girl, there's  
still a little chill in the air.

Polly grins and darts out with further instruction, Eliza tries to struggle but George just wheels her out of the room with gusto.

CUT TO:

EXT.CAMPERDOWN LODGE - AFTERNOON

George is pushing Eliza at a cracking pace, Polly follows absent mindedly.

ELIZA

Mr Cuthbertson where are you taking me?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

To see your dream.

ELIZA

But Mr Cuthbertson, I told you my dreams are just folly.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

But what of creating your reality and all the other crazy notions you talk of.

ELIZA

The ramblings of a mad woman?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Or a visionary.

George stops in the middle of the lane and briskly picks up Eliza.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

We have to walk from here, Polly, stay and guard the chair.

Before Eliza can complain George ducks behind a row of saplings.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

Now close your eyes.

He darts across an open field full of grazing sheep and stops at the bottom of a small hill.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

Ok you can open them now.

Eliza opens her eyes not sure of what she's supposed to be looking at.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
What do you see?

ELIZA  
A wool shed?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
A wool shed? Is that it?

George starts sprinting up the hill.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
Can't you see the bell tower?

ELIZA  
Am I missing something?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
It's your university Eliza, this  
is the land we are going to build  
your university on.

George gets to the top of the hill and opens the door to  
the wool shed, a fire glows in the corner and the room is  
filled with bundles of soft wool.

ELIZA  
Are we supposed to be here?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
They're so busy down that orphan  
school no one's going to come  
till the fire dies down, we have  
plenty of time to be alone.

He drops her gently on the soft bails of wool. Eliza is  
surprised by the bounce of the wool, she falls backward and  
giggles as balls of fluffs fly into the air.

ELIZA  
But...

George silences her with a long passionate kiss.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
But...

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Oh my dear Eliza, my intentions  
are completely chivalrous.

Eliza settles back down.

ELIZA  
Maybe you are Sir Galahad after  
all?

George turns to her rolling on the soft bed.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON  
Or Sir Gawain.

The corner of Eliza's lip curls.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
Miss Donnithorne, you have done  
me the honour...

Eliza gasps.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
Of divulging the secrets of your  
sovereignty to a very loyal and  
observant subject.

Eliza gazes at the perfect wooden roof, rain is tapping.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
Please do me the honour of making  
those dreams come true.

Eliza gasps.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
Marry me Eliza.

He gets down one knee.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)  
The world would be a dark, dark  
place without your love. I shall  
be the perfect consort sharing  
your light and wisdom with the  
world, not just for this lifetime  
but for all eternity.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE- NOON.

Eliza smiles as George pushes her down the gravel driveway,  
they kiss at the entrance, then straighten themselves and  
ring the bell.

Sarah answers the door and can barely hide her delight at  
the sight of the happy couple.

Sarah takes over the reins of the bath chair and pushes Eliza to Mr. Donnithorne's library. Sarah knocks on the door and enters gently while Eliza and George wait outside anxiously.

Sarah comes out and jumps up and down, then calms as Eliza glares at her.

SARAH

Mr. Donnithorne will see you now.

Eliza waits, drumming her fingers and biting her nails.

After what seems like an age, the door opens.

George walks out and shrugs his shoulders, he then turns and walks to the front door dejected. Eliza is frozen to the spot. The door opens and an irate James Donnithorne blusters out.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Don't you walk out on me young man, I don't care how many friends you have in high places - I have them in higher. How dare you come into my house and blackmail me? Get out! Out now - you scoundrel and if I find you have laid a single finger on even a strand of my daughter's hair I will have you strung young fella.

George scampers off down the drive. James storms into his library and slams the door.

CUT TO:

INT. GAD HILL, CHARLES DICKEN'S STUDY - EARLY MORNING

TITLE: GAD HILL JUNE 1861

Nelly stares in horror as the study door slowly opens and a silhouette of Charles stands there.

CHARLES

I should have known that sharing my bed with a young woman meant sharing my secrets too. An older woman would have been far more discreet. Or not have cared.

He walks into the light of the many candles she has arranged around the cosy sofa by the fire.

CHARLES (CONT'D)  
I should be outraged.

Nelly looks up radiant in the candle light.

NELLY  
And you are not?

CHARLES  
No, I'm surprisingly glad you  
care.

Nelly smiles and puts her hand to his face and kisses him. The tender moment is broken as she dives down the back of the sofa and retrieves the tightly written pages.

NELLY  
I'm so happy you're not angry  
with me, I couldn't bear to leave  
the tale now.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, MISS DONNITHORNE'S CHAMBERS- MORNING

TITLE: CAMPERDOWN LODGE MAY 1847

Eliza stares out at the bleak view from her window, only the native trees have leaves, the road is bogged and a mist hangs over the fields. She sighs heavily leaving her breath on the glass.

She turns to leave when the window is shattered. Eliza jumps then bends to pick up the small rock with a piece of parchment wrapped around it.

She opens it and smiles.

NOTE: MEET ME AT YOUR UNIVERSITY.

Eliza foot is out of plaster, she hobbles to wardrobe and selects a heavy shawl lurches over to the window and lifts up the sash.

Eliza climbs out of the window and slides down gently to the garden, she holds her back to the wall as she sidles along the building. She comes to another window. She peeks in and sees her father sitting staring at the fire.

Eliza runs as best she can behind the newly planted row of poplars, checks the coast is clear and scampers to the tree at the end of the street.

As she crosses through the saplings she sees a ray of sun peeping through the clouds hitting the little wooden hut like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Eliza stumbles to the hut and tries to open the door, it is locked. She stands there unsure of what to do.

ELIZA

What am I supposed to do now?

The clouds mass together the light disappears.

A voice comes from behind her.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Come here and give me a kiss.

George unlocks the cabin, picks her up in his arms and throws her on the bails of wool.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, MISS DONNITHORNE'S CHAMBERS -  
MORNING.

TITLE: FOUR MONTHS LATER.

Eliza stares out of the window, jacarada trees with their magnificent plumes of violet are scattered everywhere, Eliza delights in their spectacle. She checks over at the ornate clock on the mantelpiece, 11am time to go.

As she opens the window she spots someone at the gate, she slides the window closed quietly and watches as the figure appears. She is surprised to see it is George walking stridently to the front door, she cowers around trying to get a better view.

When George disappears from sight and she hears the friendly bark of the dog she runs to the other side of the room and gently unlocks the door.

She scurries down the hall and peeks around a column to see George being greeted at the door by Sarah. The very pregnant bull mastiff flops down in her basket.

SARAH

Mr. Cuthbertson, Mr Donnithorne  
is expecting you, come this way.

Before they turn Eliza runs back to her bedroom and clasps her hands together in prayer.

She stands in silhouette the afternoon spring light framing her delicate face, her ample breasts and the first signs of her growing belly.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, BANQUET HALL - MORNING

Eliza is being fussed over by a very large, very disapproving old SEAMSTRESS who is draping her in wraiths of ivory silk, TWO APPRENTICE SEAMSTRESSES fuss around making tucks and folds. They giggle together at the hem.

The woman kicks the seamstress and struggles with a drape over the bump, she pins it in place.

SEAMSTRESS

Hmmm, maybe the veil will do the trick.

She kicks the young seamstress again, who gets up and brings a roll of sheer fabric to the woman. The seamstress grabs both ends and pulls the material out of the roll, lifts it in the air and lets it drape atop Eliza's head. She looks ridiculous.

James Donnithorne can't hide his mirth as he walks into the room.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

My goodness, you gave me a fright

Eliza sees the humour.

ELIZA

I do rather feel like something out of Mrs Shelley's Frankenstein don't you think?

James raises his daughter's veil.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

I think you look beautiful and I would do anything to keep that smile upon your face.

Two chefs in white hats make their way into the room, between them a board containing the most exquisite cake, Eliza runs over in wonder.

ELIZA

Tomorrow morning at 9am I shall  
smile for all eternity.

CUT TO:

INT. RED LION HOTEL, GEORGE STREET - EVENING.

The Red Lion is in full swing, wenches pass flagons of beer to the drunken workers and ex convicts, at the bar a group of young men struggle to stay upright. In their centre George Cuthbertson sways on his stool. Benjamin Dickens stands behind the bar and plies him with alcohol.

BENJAMIN

So you won her heart, you should  
have put money on it. I for one  
would be making you a rich man  
tonight.

George is in high spirits.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

No need my good man, I hit the  
jackpot. The old man's putting me  
on a salary for life, couldn't  
have the great James  
Donnithorne's daughter married to  
a mere clerk.

He spills most of his drink and looks round his motley  
group of friends all practically comatose with grog.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

Won't be seeing them no more,  
look at them, worthless the lot  
of them. Spend all those years  
learning to read and write and  
learn the principals of  
accounting and record keeping and  
what do they do with it?

He lifts up the hand of his mate asleep next to him and  
drops it on the bar.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

Accountancy and record keeping  
that's what. Not an ounce of  
imagination or cunning about  
them.

BENJAMIN

And what makes you so different?

George leans in and falls off his elbow spilling more of his ale, Benjamin fills it freely. Georges mate slips off his seat and lands with a thud on the floor.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

I know what I want and I'll do anything, use anyone to get it.

BENJAMIN

So Miss Donnithorne didn't stand a chance?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Oh the early stuff was easy, the old baritone made it simple to befriend the vicar - who shared everything Eliza believed with absolute no discretion. Think the poor blighter was in love with her, once he started talking about her - he simply couldn't stop. The old biddy at the bookstore was the same, all I had to do was read a few stories and learn a few not written down.

He looks over at a group of natives sitting at a table and raises his beer to them.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D (CONT'D)

But it was you, me old chap, who provided the finest ammunition.

At that moment Quentin walks into the bar apprehensive of the stares of the drunken customers, his flamboyant clothes alerting them to his presence like a beacon.

George sees him.

GEORGE

Ah, here he is now - right on cue.

George turns to Quentin and shouts over the shocked hubbub.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

Over here Quentin, come and park your pretty backside over here.

Quentin is rather chuffed at the innuendo and slowly picks his way through the crowd to a round of wolf whistles.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

He helped me on two fronts, got  
me in with the mason's - her  
father's a big poobah.

Quentin has been grabbed by a large toothless man who is  
trying for a kiss.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

And thanks to you and your  
snippet of priceless information -  
I took advantage of the old  
Donnithorne's weakness - or  
rather Quentin did, buggered 'im  
right royally if you get my  
drift.

Benjamin is disgusted, he's ready to fly over the bar but  
restrains himself when Quentin makes his way to the bar and  
rubs his fingers on the back of Georges neck.

BENJAMIN

And what does he gain from this  
transaction?

Quentin sits on the stool and bats his eyelids.

QUEN

Well, tonight's the night we've  
all been waiting for. You marry  
Eliza Donnithorne and we become  
lovers for life.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

If I were a fucking faggot.

George punches Quentin with such velocity he is knocked off  
the chair and falls on the drunken accountant who had  
previously sat at the stool. George looks down dazed

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

I wondered where he went.

Benjamin leans over the bar, then refills Georges glass to  
the brim and pours one for himself.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

You see my old chap, the secret  
of cunning is to always tell the  
truth, the way you see it.

BENJAMIN

And what's the truth for brassy  
britches down there?

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

I merely told him if he helped me marry Eliza we would be lovers forever. It was his fancy that made him believe that the 'we' referred to him and I.

Benjamin shakes his head and raises his glass in greeting.

BENJAMIN

To George Cuthbertson the greatest rogue to patronise this establishment.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON

But wait, I haven't shown you the best bit.

He goes to unbutton his fly.

GEORGE CUTHBERTSON (CONT'D)

The biggest weapon in the arsenal. Word has it you'll soon be seeing a young George Cuthbertson around these parts.

George pulls out his flaccid member and passes out falling off his chair landing on Quentin, his pants around his knees.

Benjamin clicks his fingers and a group of shadowy figures standing at the door walk to the bar. They hand him three gold coins and drag the comatose men out of the bar by their feet.

Benjamin flicks the coins in the air.

BENJAMIN

Thankfully we won't be seeing the old George Cuthbertson round here for a while.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, BANQUET ROOM - MORNING

Eliza is in her finished dress, her chambers are filled with blooms, but no bride could bloom more than her. Sarah and Polly are both in pink maids dresses and fuss around with her train.

Eliza looks out of the window at the flowered arch in the garden.

Carriage after carriage pulls up and crowds of people in all their finery walk down the gravel driveway draped in garlands.

The vicar spots Eliza and gives an encouraging wave. He is almost knocked out of the way by best man dressed in his tails, but with his collar askew and looking worse for wear.

SARAH

Come away from there, he might  
see you - you know it's bad luck.

Eliza pulls away, she looks at the mantle piece, the clock says twenty to nine.

Her father comes to the door along with the dishevelled best man and cries at the sight of her. Eliza lifts her veil and realises his tears are not those of joy or pride but sheer terror.

ELIZA

Where is he? Where's George?

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Three men were shanghaied from  
the Red Lion hotel in the city  
last night - records show they  
were on the ship out to India  
this morn.

ELIZA

So that was your plan?

JAMES DONNITHORNE

No Eliza I swear.

Eliza just turns away emotionless, her father is distraught, he ushers everyone out of the room and tries to console Eliza, she just ignores him. He walks out broken.

Eliza looks at the crowds below all tutting and gossiping.

She watches them disperse. When the final carriage pulls away she opens the sash and runs and runs and runs.

CUT TO:

EXT.WOOLSHED - MORNING.

Eliza runs out of breath at the bottom of the hill, she looks up at the wool shed, the clouds part and a ray of sun illuminates the tiny hut.

Eliza sinks to her knees and screams at the heavens, everything starts to spin and the sound of a bull roarer fills the air.

CUT TO BLACK

FADE UP

EXT.WOOLSHED - DREAM SCENE

Eliza opens her eyes to see Polly looking at her with concern, Polly is in traditional dress and is covered in white paint.

POLLY

Here Miss, come with me.

Eliza is unsure where she is, the light is strange and she feels light headed, she sits up gently then stares in amazement as she looks up the hill, the wool shed has gone and is replaced by a magnificent building with bell towers and hundred of windows rising three floors.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Come, come - he won't wait.

Polly reaches for Eliza's hand and rushes her up the hill, through the impressive entrance and into the elegant quadrangle.

Sitting on the grass in the middle is another native covered in white paint and a red band around his head. He looks at Eliza and laughs.

Eliza is looking around like a child in a sweet shop admiring every detail, yet puzzled as to how she got there.

PUNJAL

Come sit child.

He pats the green turf next to him, Eliza glides over as if in a dream. She sits next to him Eliza stares at the architecture - the elder stares into space.

PUNJAL (CONT'D)

So what do you think?

ELIZA

It's the most beautiful place  
I've ever seen.

PUNJAL

But you've seen it before.

ELIZA  
Only in my dreams.

The elder laughs.

PUNJAL  
So what else do you see?

Eliza looks around not sure what she's supposed to be looking for. Then the bells ring and groups of male students wearing capes walk through the quadrangle.

Punjal laughs.

PUNJAL (CONT'D)  
Dream bigger little one.

In the shadows Eliza sees a cloaked figure lurking behind a pillar, the figure motions for someone to come forward, a group of girls in bustles and capes run through the quadrangle. Eliza smiles.

Punjal laughs harder.

The group scurry through the main gate into nothingness.

PUNJAL (CONT'D)  
What else do you see?

ELIZA  
Nothing.

Punjal cocks his head. Eliza turns to him and is mesmerised by his eyes that look into her very soul.

PUNJAL  
I said what do you see?

Eliza turns and her jaw drops, a road now leads from the university and beyond it a city of glittering towers.

Eliza is lost in the vision, till Polly and Punjab walk out of the gate arm in arm laughing and smiling, as they exit the gate the nothingness reappears and Eliza finds herself atop the hill, the wool shed behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, BANQUET HALL -AFTERNOON.

Eliza kisses the sleeping dog at the door and picks one of her new born pups and strokes it, then turns to the dining room.

At the end of the table Sarah is slowly clearing away the crockery.

ELIZA

What are you doing?

SARAH

I'm clearing away Miss.

ELIZA

Well stop this instance. This room is not to be cleared till I am Mrs. George Cuthbertson. And I am going to marry George Cuthbertson, I just saw God or the architect of the universe or someone and he showed me the vision for Utopia, the university everything - I saw it, I saw it. Come with me to the kitchen I must tell you and Polly everything.

A tear runs down her face.

SARAH

But Miss...

Eliza sees the distress on her face.

ELIZA

Good God, what is it?

Sarah bursts into floods of tears and wipes them on her apron speaking between her sobs.

SARAH

No more than half an hour since, poor Polly just froze and fell to the floor shaking, then she just stopped, her eyes white, her body rigid, it was as if her soul itself has been sucked out of her.

ELIZA

And what are you doing here?

SARAH

Cook told me to make myself useful. Mr. Donnithorne's tending to Polly and the doc's on his way, I thought I'd help by clearing away in here.

But Eliza is not listening, she bolts down the corridor still clutching the pup, she passes the kitchen, cook is absentmindedly stirring a pot.

Eliza comes to a small door at the end of the corridor, it is ajar, she hears her father weeping, she stops and peers in.

The comatose Polly lies on the bed, James Donnithorne openly weeps next to her, praying.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

You raise me in Sodom and  
Gomorrah dear Lord and expect me  
to resist the pleasures of the  
flesh? I lost two daughters in  
one day for my sins. Was that not  
punishment enough? One moment of  
weakness, just one and I have to  
live that day again? Today?

James collapses over the catatonic Polly.

The cook and the doctor bustle down the corridor. Eliza knocks gently on the door.

Eliza nods for the doctor to go in then speeds down the corridor and into her room.

She closes the door behind her and wails, she falls on the bed still clutching the puppy and sobs loudly and uncontrollably.

CUT TO:

INT.CHARLES DICKENS' HOUSE - EARLY MORNING.

TITLE GAD HILL JUNE 1861

Nelly drops the pages to think.

Charles smiles and opens the lush velvet curtains revealing the first light of day.

NELLY

It's far more gripping than your  
serials. Charles you really must  
be more thorough with your female  
characters. Miss Haversham is but  
a comedic sketch.

Charles snatches the papers from Eliza's hand.

CHARLES

Now you see why I burn my letters? Turns everyone into a critic, even words not from my pen.

NELLY

Well they should have been. If you'd done your research you would have found that it was the maid who went mad. She had obviously given her spirit to the architect of the universe as a gift to Miss Donnithorne the seed of her dream of a university.

CHARLES

I beg your pardon?

Nelly sits on the edge of the sofa ready to pounce should Charles attempt to burn the pages.

NELLY

Punjel the architect of the universe, Eliza had the gift of prophesy.

Charles is quite concerned.

NELLY (CONT'D)

You can't see it?

CHARLES

Where are you up to?

NELLY

The day of the wedding.

Charles sighs and starts speaking to Nelly as if she were a child.

CHARLES

Her groom has been shanghaied, she blames her father, runs to the wool shed where her illegitimate child was conceived and sees visions. She then returns to find the maid catatonic and the father grieving over the child that was obviously an offspring from his first trip to New South Wales.

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

She then storms off to her room,  
locks the door and stays there  
for months deluded that George  
will return when her baby is  
born. Would send the most  
rational of minds a bit bonkers.

Charles pulls on a long velvet tassel, a bell rings.

NELLY

But the code?

CHARLES

The story between the lines?  
Don't bother yourself with such  
ridiculousness. Look where it got  
Miss Donnithorne.

NELLY

I am not privy to Miss  
Donnithorne's fate. I only have a  
few more pages to read.

The door opens the butler stands awaiting instructions.

BUTLER

You rang sir.

CHARLES

I shall breakfast in the dining  
room this morning. Bring a tray  
for Miss Ternan, she has some  
correspondence she wishes to  
catch up on.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, MISS DONNITHORNE'S CHAMBERS.  
FEBRUARY 1848 - MORNING.

TITLE: CAMPERDOWN LODGE FEBRUARY 1848

Eliza lays on the bed, she is very pregnant, on the bed is  
the now sixteen week old Bull Mastiff.

There is a knock on the door.

SARAH (FROM BEHIND DOOR)

Your breakfast miss.

Eliza waits till she hears the maid scamper off and opens  
the door. She puts the tray on the floor which the dog  
gulps down and walks to the window.

She looks down the gravel driveway, the grass is parched from the summer heat. Down the driveway a group of natives in ceremonial dress walk slowly in silence.

Eliza buckles and holds her stomach.

Eliza falls to the floor and cries out in pain.

CUT TO BLACK

FADE IN:

Eliza comes round, the room is spinning, she can barely make out the faces around her - her father, Sarah, the aborigines in paint, a doctor stands at the edge of the bed, a baby cries, a cloth is put over Miss Donnithorne's mouth.

CUT TO BLACK

FADE IN:

Eliza comes round, it is a beautiful day, she walks to the window and pulls the curtain back, the Aborigines are walking down the driveway, carrying Polly still open eyed and rigid.

The door opens and Sarah steps in.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Oh Miss, thank goodness you're awake, we was getting worried about you Miss, feared you were going the same as Polly.

ELIZA

Where are they taking her?

SARAH

Dunno Miss, the doctors tried everything for months, in the end he called for her people, been here for three days they have. Mumbling over her, said they couldn't do any more and have to take her to a sacred place.

Eliza is troubled.

ELIZA

I have been asleep for three days?

SARAH

Yes ma'am the doctor knocked you out to take away the pain and this is the first time you've opened your eyes since.

Eliza rubs her eyes.

ELIZA

Where's my baby?

Sarah looks from side to side unsure of her answer, then looks at Miss Donnithorne full of heart-felt sympathy.

SARAH

She's gone miss.

ELIZA

When?

SARAH

No more than two hours after she came in the world.

Eliza stares blankly out of the window. At the bottom of the garden two gardeners are digging a hole. Eliza falls to her knees and starts singing quietly

ELIZA

The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.  
 He makes me down to lie  
 In pastures green; He leadeth me  
 The quiet waters by.  
 My soul He doth restore again;  
 And me to walk doth make  
 Within the paths of  
 righteousness,  
 Even for His own Name's sake.  
 Yea, though I walk in death's  
 dark vale,  
 Yet will I fear no ill;  
 For Thou art with me; and Thy rod  
 And staff my comfort still

Sarah starts crying and runs out of the door.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, LIBRARY- NIGHT.

TITLE: ONE MONTH LATER

James sits enjoying a cigar with Mrs. MacArthur.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

I hope my little pleasure is kept  
between you and me Mr  
Donnithorne.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Mrs MacArthur, you have been in  
these colonies for over six score  
and the only whiff of scandal is  
a little cigar smoke. Enjoy it. A  
clear conscience is something I  
fear I shall never possess.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Oh James, you are too hard on  
yourself, the poor chap had one  
too many on his stag night and  
found himself on a ship to India.  
You are not responsible. Thought  
you did the noble thing letting  
him wed her in the first place.

JAMES DONNITHORNE

The maids were gossiping so about  
her growing belly I had no  
choice.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

And where is the babe?

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Sent her down to a servant in  
South Australia, Mrs Anne Kelly  
been barren for years, a blessing  
really.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

And how's Eliza taking it?

JAMES DONNITHORNE

Strange really, she never  
mentions it - never asked about  
the child. As if it never  
happened. However, she is up and  
about in the house. Won't venture  
out for fear of gossip, but she  
has some new frocks - all white,  
claims it to be the colour of  
mourning for a jilted bride. But  
she is gradually coming back to  
life. That vicar of hers has  
started visiting every Wednesday.

(MORE)

JAMES DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)

Even speaks to me these days - of sorts.

Mrs. MacArthur is pleased.

JAMES

Still won't hear a word against Cuthbertson though, she genuinely believes he's going to earn his passage and return to build some dream they both hatched up. I worry for her mental state, she goes on for days of how God showed her the plans for the city and God knows what, it's quite an obsession.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Should she see the doc? There's a new American in town with some very progressive ideas on insanity.

JAMES

Oh she's not insane, just overly passionate. I have no idea what she's going on about most of the time, but she's been through quite an ordeal - she'll pull through.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Well she certainly has enough people with her best interests at heart. Such a sweet girl, I even talked the lands office into giving Grose farm for that university she dreams of, miles out of town and almost impossible for students to reach, but like everything here we have to build for the future, no matter how improbable it appears.

JAMES

Mrs MacArthur, you are a marvel, nothing will cheer her more than to see her visions realised.

Mrs. MacArthur takes a big slug on her cigar and smiles to herself.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Well, we all know the power of a dream - don't we?

James stops mid puff.

JAMES

Could George Cuthbertson have known about Grose Farm?

MRS. MACARTHUR.

He was a clerk at the lands office, I am sure it wouldn't have been hard to discover my correspondence.

James laughs.

JAMES

So that's how the rat pulled the wool over her eyes.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

Has he been spotted?

JAMES

Oh yes, he's in Calcutta.

MRS. MACARTHUR.

But I thought you weren't behind his deportation.

JAMES

I wasn't, in fact I'm giving him a helping hand to return, got him a fine job at the East India Company, soon see what he's made of - could be back any day - God forbid.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, DRAWING ROOM - AFTERNOON.

Miss Donnithorne sits with the vicar having tea.

VICAR

Have you been reading much?

MISS DONNITHORNE

I've been rather taken with sketching, since my whole experience on the hill.

(MORE)

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
I've told you of the experience  
on the hill?

The vicar is surprised she would ask.

VICAR  
I hear of little else on my  
visits.

Miss Donnithorne ignores his little barb.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
I felt it my duty to convey the  
images he bestowed upon me.

Miss Donnithorne pulls out a sketch book from beside her chair, it is filled with notes and sketches. She leafs through the pages and stops on one.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
Here it is.

She turns the book and shows him a sketch of a large building with an imposing central bell tower.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
That's the university, built on  
the hill, just past orphan creek.

The vicar is impressed.

VICAR  
My goodness Eliza, such detail.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
But that's not all.

She leafs through the pages all showing an amazing city with skyscrapers and a tower in the middle shaped like a lily.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
This is everything I saw.

She points to a man made device flying in the air.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
I saw the future.

VICAR  
Why would God show you the  
future?

MISS DONNITHORNE  
So I could create it.

VICAR

You are going to build a  
University and a city and  
machines that fly in the sky?

MISS DONNITHORNE

It's possible. What if all time  
is concurrent?

VICAR

I beg your pardon.

MISS DONNITHORNE

What if everything that has ever  
happened and will ever happened  
is happening right now? What if I  
saw what was already there? What  
if this secret had been handed  
down to only those who could see  
it.

VICAR

See what?

MISS DONNITHORNE

Between the veils of  
consciousness.

VICAR

Ah Eliza, you are consistent if  
nothing else.

He picks up his bible.

VICAR (CONT'D)

But do you not fear this is the  
work of the devil?

MISS DONNITHORNE

How could it be?

VICAR

Didn't Satan tempt our lord with  
all the kingdoms of the world? Is  
he tempting you with visions to  
deprive you of a real life?

MISS DONNITHORNE

Isn't that the pot calling the  
kettle black?

VICAR

I don't follow.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
 Didn't your vision from God  
 deprive you of a real life?

VICAR  
 One where I eat and sleep and  
 partake in fresh air? I worry  
 that you have become lost in your  
 quest, accepting dreams instead  
 of reality. I fear your travels  
 from the holy book have led you  
 far from God's grace.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
 Is that what you think?

VICAR  
 That's what I fear.

Eliza stares into the distance lost in thought.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
 So you're only here to save my  
 soul.

VICAR  
 It's worth saving.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
 So you can keep me in God's good  
 grace?

VICAR  
 I shall try.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
 Why?

The vicar is unsure of what to say, it's as if his heart  
 wants to say something, but his brain another.

VICAR  
 Because you're soul's worth  
 saving.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
 And what of the rest of me?

The vicar summons up all his courage.

VICAR  
 Well there is one way to rebuild  
 your dignity, but it would  
 require a loss in status.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
I don't follow.

The vicar fumbles with his bible.

VICAR  
The wife of a vicar commands  
respect but unfortunately lacks  
the more material pleasures.

Eliza can't believe what she's hearing.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
Are you proposing to me vicar?

VICAR  
I care for you Miss Donnithorne,  
I hear what they all say about  
you and I know you to be far  
superior to any of their gossip.  
I wish to restore your virtue the  
only way I know how.

Eliza laughs gently.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
The simplistic way.

The vicar doesn't know what to do or say or where to turn.  
Eliza gently touches the side of his face.

MISS DONNITHORNE (CONT'D)  
Vicar, I appreciate your concern  
for my soul and I know you are a  
loyal servant of God. But you  
don't have to do this.

The vicar gulps.

VICAR  
Don't I?

He looks at Eliza hopefully.

Eliza smiles back and tilts her head in empathy.

MISS DONNITHORNE  
No, you don't.

The vicar stands to leave broken and disappointed.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, KITCHEN - MORNING.

TITLE: FOUR YEARS LATER

Eliza breezes into the kitchen, at the door a teenage girl (BETH 12) stands with a cardboard suitcase.

Eliza notices the shy young girl.

ELIZA

And who do we have here?

Sarah looks proudly.

SARAH

My little sis, Ma'am. Since they closed the orphan school Mr. Donnithorne says she can come live with us, it's been hard on me without Polly. Beth will certainly help.

Eliza holds her hand out to the young lady.

ELIZA

Pleased to meet you Beth. So they have closed the orphan school?

BETH

Yes ma'am they're clearing the land at Grose farm, all the other girls have been sent to Mrs Macquarie's school at Parramatta.

ELIZA

And what are they to do with the land?

BETH

They say it's going to be a grand University.

Eliza gasps, she doesn't want to hear another word.

She runs down the corridor and in to her father's library.

ELIZA

Papa, papa! George has done it! They are clearing the land at the orphanage, they're building a university exactly where he said we would.

(MORE)

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 Oh Papa, he's found a way, he'll  
 be home soon I just know it...

Mr Donnithorne is not responding.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 Papa! Papa?

James Donnithorne's lifeless body slumps.

ELIZA (CONT'D)  
 Papa!

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, LIBRARY - AFTERNOON.

A solicitor is reading the will, Eliza is lost in a daze.

SOLICITOR  
 And to Anna Kelly of whom I have  
 a natural affection I leave an  
 annual allowance of ten pounds to  
 be administered by her guardian  
 Mrs Ann Kelly.

ELIZA  
 Excuse me, who are these people?

SOLICITOR  
 An old servant of Mr  
 Donnithorne's.

ELIZA  
 A natural affection? We all know  
 what that means, how old is this  
 child?

The solicitor looks down the record.

SOLICITOR  
 Four years ma'am.

ELIZA  
 My father sired another bastard  
 in his old age?

SOLICITOR  
 I don't believe that's the case.

ELIZA  
 Well whose child is it?

SOLICITOR

Mr. Donnithorne instructed the child be taken away immediately to avert more scandal.

ELIZA

But she died, my baby died.

Eliza looks around the room to try and get some answers, everyone looks at her with great sympathy, but no one knows what to say.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Is this my baby? Did she live? Do you know? Is this my baby?

Eliza is getting hysterical, no one seems to know what to say. Finally the cook breaks her silence.

COOK

Yes, me dear she lived, your father had the doc give you chloroform so you wouldn't know, gave you way too much - thought we'd lost you we did. Your babe was in a carriage with a wet nurse as soon as your father could get them here. You never said anything about the bairn, thought you knew what had happened.

ELIZA

But I saw them digging a plot for her.

COOK

That was for Mavis, she never got over the birth of them pups - way too big a litter for such an old dog - didn't you miss her?

Eliza is aghast, she can't speak.

The solicitor is unsure of what to make of the situation, but clears his throat and carries on.

SOLICITOR

The remainder of my estate I bestow upon my beloved daughter Eliza.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, LIBRARY - NIGHT.

Eliza opens the door to her father's study and looks around as if it is the first time she has ever stepped in to the room.

She studies the rows of volumes on the walls and settles in her father's chair behind the desk. She's not comfortable, she looks over and sees a cigar box, opens the lid and takes out a cigar, attempts to cut it with the clippers, but makes a hash of it squashing the end, undeterred she takes a taper and lights it in the fire and settles back to light the corona. She coughs and splutters on her first puff, but warms to the taste on her second and by her third she is delightfully dizzy.

Eliza takes an envelope and opens it, inside is a small key, she tries the top lock on the desk but it doesn't work, she then attempts the bottom lock and a large file draw comes out filled with identical black leather bound books. Eliza opens the first book to see the inscription "The Diary of James Donnithorne 1852" she opens the page, turns to the fire and starts to read.

She reads volume after volume in to the night.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE - MORNING.

TITLE: SIX WEEKS LATER.

A carriage pulls up the driveway, the maids and cook and all the servants line up to greet the new arrival. Out of the carriage a four year old girl with the same curly red locks as Eliza steps cautiously out of the carriage, behind her a homely middle aged woman fusses.

Eliza stands at the door with the bull mastiff, she sees the child and wants to run, but something stops her, she can't cross the threshold. The little girl smiles as she is cooed over by the staff and finally reaches the final step.

Her foster mum stands behind her protectively.

Eliza can't contain herself any further and hugs the child swinging her around in the air.

ANNA

Oh mama you're as beautiful as  
grand pops said in his letters.

Eliza is incredulous.

ELIZA

He told you of me?

ANNA

He always said I had the best  
Mama in the world and one day you  
would call for me and Mrs. Kelly  
and we would live happily ever  
after, like a fairy tale, Grand  
papa said you love fairy tales.

The little girl jumps down from Eliza's arms and runs to her cardboard suitcase, she opens it to find a sketch of Eliza, a pile of letters tied in pink ribbon and volume upon volume of fairy tales.

ANNA (CONT'D)

I can't read them yet, but Mama  
you will read them for me won't  
you?

Eliza picks up a small volume and smiles. She takes the little girl's hand and walks down the corridor, Anna skipping beside.

ELIZA

The Phoenix bird by Hans  
Christian Anderson. In the Garden  
of Paradise, beneath the Tree of  
Knowledge, bloomed a rose bush.  
Here, in the first rose, a bird  
was born...

CUT TO:

INT.STUDY GADD HILL - MORNING.

Nelly wipes a tear as she reads the end of the letter.

NELLY (VO)

I had imagined we had found our  
happily ever after. I do hope the  
conclusion of your serial Mr.  
Dickens will allow us to return  
to the peace we have enjoyed  
these last years. Yours  
faithfully, Miss Eliza  
Donnithorne.

Nelly sprints off the sofa.

CUT TO:

INT. GAD HILL, DINING ROOM.

Nelly storms into the room, pulls up a chair and glares at the astonished Charles.

NELLY

You didn't tell me you knew of Estella.

CHARLES

I didn't know of Estella, who in your mind is Estella?

NELLY

Anna, Miss Donnithorne's daughter of course.

CHARLES

How could I have known of Anna? Nobody knew of Anna. Plus the fact Miss Haversham has an adopted child - not a daughter.

NELLY

Precisely, she's far too one-dimensional to be a mother. But Miss Donnithorne is the rounded character she should have been. Judging by the correspondence the child has obviously been brought up in a celebration of love instead of the misandry you purport.

Charles guffaws.

CHARLES

What do you mean?

NELLY

Misandry - the hatred of men.

CHARLES

Yes, I know the meaning of the word, I'm just puzzling with your context.

Nelly sighs.

NELLY

You have portrayed Miss Haversham as a wicked old lady who has tutored her daughter in the ways of her cold heart.

CHARLES

'Misandry' makes for a better story - it's central to Pip's redemption.

NELLY

But what of Anna's redemption?

CHARLES

You've read my story, Miss Haversham dies in a fire, as soon as the people of Sydney read the last chapters they will see the similarities end and Miss Donnithorne and her daughter can carry on with their lives as if none of this ever happened.

NELLY

What stuck in a house for fear of a scandal you have recreated?

CHARLES

My dear sweet Nelly, there are so many mysteries of heaven and earth, I have no idea how my fanciful tale got so enmeshed with Miss Donnithorne's reality. But Miss Donnithorne's suffers from trying to explain the unexplainable and I fear you do too.

NELLY

But Anna suffers a harsher fate than Miss Donnithorne and that is too sad for words.

CHARLES

And that is not reality. Estella suffered from the hatred Miss Haversham passed to her. Anna will enjoy the riches of the romantic heart Miss Donnithorne so obviously possesses.

Nelly's still not taking no for an answer.

NELLY

So why can't Estella?

CHARLES

I beg your pardon?

NELLY

Why can't Estella have a happy ending?

CHARLES

It wouldn't be in keeping with the darkness and morality of the tale.

NELLY

Who wants darkness and morality? Surely we all need hope?

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, LIBRARY - AFTERNOON.

TITLE: CAMPERDOWN LODGE 1869

Plorn Dickens looks in horror as the flames lick at the book, he rushes to the fire and picks it out with his hands,

Anna motions for him to exit, he retreats throwing the book in the air like a hot potato.

They leave the library and arrive in the sanctuary of the corridor. Plorn lets out a big sigh, Anna spots his hands are burnt.

ANNA

Oh my goodness, your hands, let me get you to the kitchen and run that under some cold water.

Anna rushes him to the kitchen Sarah and her sister are preparing dinner. Anna rushes him over to the sink and Beth pumps the water over his hands.

ANNA (CONT'D)

A little ironic don't you think?

PLORN

I beg your pardon?

ANNA

Didn't Pip burn his hands trying to save Miss Havensham from the fire?

Pip is taken aback by this statement.

PLORN

My father always said he based the Pip character on me. My life has mirrored his in many ways. I had a gay time in London, the most incredible doors open when you're the son of one of England's most popular novelists. But now I am in Australia to earn a decent wage and learn the next installment of my father's "great expectations".

Anna pats Plorn's hands with a cloth.

ANNA

Yes Mr Dicken's pen does seem to have some mystic power over reality - if you suspend belief in practical notion of time.

Plorn is entranced. Anna notices.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Come it's a beautiful day let's take a stroll, we have so few visitors.

They take the back door and into the overgrown garden.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Please excuse the unkempt gardens, another effect of your father's imagination I'm afraid.

PLORN

How?

ANNA

Back in '61 everyone wanted to know something about "Sydney's Miss Havensham" The colony loves a good scandal and Mr. Dickens gave them all chance to relive Mama's for a second time. No one ever knew of my arrival, it was more appropriate that way.

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

The maids are more like friends to Mama and would never break her confidence. But there were whispers, newspapers offered a small fortune to find a tidbit of information about Miss Donnithorne's antics and proof of 'Estella's' existence.

Anna trips on a loose flagstone.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Gardeners and stable hands could not be trusted. This place has seen little care these last eight years. I quite like it though, makes so much more of the horror story don't you think?

PLORN

Well Miss Donnithorne certainly plays her part.

Anna laughs.

ANNA

You didn't meet her, you met the woman your father wrote about.

PLORN

But papa always spoke in such glowing terms of her true nature, why else do you think he changed his ending?

ANNA

So Estella and Pip don't meet like this in the ruins of Satis House to a hopeful future?

PLORN

That was the changed version.

ANNA

Well that's what we all read in the papers, but what did my mother read?

PLORN

Father sent her an early manuscript where Estella ends up in her second loveless marriage runs into Pip on the street and for a fleeting moment experiences the love she missed. "Suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be."

Anna stops at the end of the grounds and looks over at the the university, the building is identical to Miss Donnithorne's sketches and visions.

ANNA

So Estella was a victim of her conditioning, a prisoner of her mad mother's broken dreams.

Plorn looks at her full of hope. Anna laughs and shakes her head.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Your father was very incisive, he should have kept his original ending.

Plorn is disappointed and puzzled.

PLORN

You wish to be a prisoner of her dreams?

ANNA

Dreams this noble yes, but like most dreams they don't always make sense.

Anna looks out over the university.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Mama dreamed of a great university on that hill, coincidentally so did a few others, but not Mama's grand scheme. She gave them vast amounts of money to build it to her exacting visions, they agreed to an extra floor and the bell tower, but they wouldn't give her the feature she most desired.

PLORN

And that was?

ANNA

Female students.

PLORN

So you remain a prisoner here  
unable to gain an education like  
your mother?

ANNA

Oh no, I am bound for England at  
the end of the week, I have a  
place at Girton College Oxford. I  
shall just be plain old Anne  
Kelly a rather bright girl with a  
mysterious past. Estella will be  
history. It is my mother who is  
imprisoned.

Anna looks out over the vista.

ANN

Trapped within the pages of your  
father's book.

The couple look out over the magnificent scene, a ray of  
light hits the bell tower and the bells chime.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE, MISS DONNITHORNE'S CHAMBERS -  
MORNING

TITLE SEVENTEEN YEARS LATER

The bells chime, Miss Donnithorne is now sixty, she rises  
out of bed, splashes her face with water on the wash stand.  
Dries her face in a towel and looks in the mirror.

The reflection shines back a radiant and vibrant Eliza.  
Miss Donnithorne smiles and heads to the wardrobe and picks  
out the lilac dress. She puts it over her head and lets it  
fall over her head. She does herself up, pinches her  
cheeks, primps her hair and walks out of the bedroom, out  
of the front door and down the gravel driveway, laces of  
her bodice flying in the air.

She walks down what used to be a lane, now a busy  
thoroughfare, she looks in amazement as a steam powered  
tram passes her.

She reaches the bottom of the hill where the wool shed used to stand and looks up at the university.

Miss Donnithorne heads up the hill.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPERDOWN LODGE

Sarah notices Miss Donnithorne's open door, she knocks gently.

SARAH

Miss.

There is no reply, she gently opens the door, the room is empty, the wardrobe door ajar. Sarah goes to shut it and notices the missing lilac dress.

She walks out and looks in every room for Miss Donnithorne.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREAT HALL SYDNEY UNIVERSITY - MORNING

It is graduation day, the hall is filled with young men in mortar boards and their proud families. The dean is standing at the lectern calling out names.

Miss Donnithorne sits at the back of the hall watching with interest, a man sits next to her.

MAN IN HALL

Time to go.

Miss Donnithorne looks at the man, she is not in the least bit surprised to see it is Charles Dickens.

CHARLES DICKENS

Does it make sense now?

Miss Donnithorne looks to the stage as a group of four women stand to receive their degrees.

MISS DONNITHORNE

We do live forever don't we?

Miss Donnithorne looks with pride at the female graduates.

CHARLES DICKENS

Not us my dear - just what we create.

Miss Donnithorne's head drops. She sits alone unnoticed alone at the back of the hall.

CUT TO:

INT.CAMPERDOWN LODGE DINING ROOM.

The clock on the mantelpiece starts ticking and the hand moves past the twenty to.

THE END

End titles:

The aged Sarah and Beth open the doors to the banquet room.

They open the curtains, dust flies.

They collect the plates, blowing on each one to remove a caking of dust before stacking.

Beth takes the plates to the kitchen and washes them one by one in the tub, scrubbing them till they gleam.

Sarah dries them with a soft towel.

Sarah takes each plate and places it neatly in the kitchen dresser.

She closes the door.